

Lecture Transcript and Course Guidebook



Exploring the Roots of Religion

Professor John R. Hale
University of Louisville

Part 1 of 3



THE TEACHING COMPANY®

**Exploring the Roots
of Religion**

Part I

Professor John R. Hale



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John R. Hale, Director of Liberal Studies at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, is an archaeologist with fieldwork experience in England, Scandinavia, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, and the Ohio River Valley. At the University of Louisville, Professor Hale teaches introductory courses on archaeology and specialized courses on the Bronze Age, the ancient Greeks, the Roman world, Celtic cultures, Vikings, and nautical and underwater archaeology.

Archaeology has been the focus of Professor Hale's career, from his undergraduate studies at Yale University to his research at the University of Cambridge, where he received his Ph.D. The subject of his dissertation was the Bronze Age ancestry of the Viking longship, a study that involved field surveys of ship designs in prehistoric rock art in southern Norway and Sweden. During more than 30 years of archaeological work, Professor Hale has excavated at a Romano-British town in Lincolnshire, England, as well as at a Roman villa in Portugal; has carried out interdisciplinary studies of ancient oracle sites in Greece and Turkey, including the famed Delphic oracle; and has participated in an undersea search in Greek waters for lost fleets from the Greek and Persian wars. In addition, Professor Hale is a member of a scientific team developing and refining a method for dating mortar, concrete, and plaster from ancient buildings—a method that employs radiocarbon analysis with an accelerator mass spectrometer.

Professor Hale published *Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy* in 2009. In addition, he has published his work in *Antiquity*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, *The Classical Bulletin*, and *Scientific American*. Most of Professor Hale's work is interdisciplinary and involves collaborations with geologists, chemists, nuclear physicists, historians, zoologists, botanists, physical anthropologists, geographers, and art historians.

Professor Hale has received numerous awards for his distinguished teaching, including the Panhellenic Teacher of the Year Award and the Delphi Center Award. He has toured the United States and Canada as a lecturer for the Archaeological Institute of America and has presented lecture series at museums and universities in Finland, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

Professor Hale is the instructor of two other Teaching Company courses: *The Greek and Persian Wars* and *Classical Archaeology of Ancient Greece and Rome*.

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Scope:

The most important record of religious history resides not in books and sacred texts but buried in the earth. Ancient graves, statues, temples, standing stones, sacrificial offerings, and places of initiation all bear witness to the universal human quest for spiritual power and understanding. Since the beginnings of scientific archaeology in the 18th century, excavators have been discovering and interpreting evidence ranging from tiny goddess figurines carved from mammoth ivory to entire sacred landscapes, such as at the Giza plateau in Egypt. The millennia of human experience that preceded the invention of writing about 5,000 years ago is only accessible to us through archaeology. And even for more recent religions and cults, the “testimony of the spade” provides an essential perspective that enhances our understanding of the literary tradition.

Archaeology provides evidence that is very different in nature from historical writings. With aerial reconnaissance and remote sensing technology, archaeologists relocate lost temples and other cult sites. With trowels and brushes, they gently remove the dust of ages from buried sites and artifacts. And with space-age laboratory techniques, they analyze the residues left by royal funeral feasts as well as the last meals of sacrificial victims.

Some 30,000 years before scribes made the first religious writings, Ice Age peoples of Europe and the Near East were creating shrines in caves, modeling images of divinities and shamans, and using art and music in ceremonies. Even earlier, in the time of the Neanderthals, some of the tribe's deceased were laid in their graves with flowers, possibly symbolizing resurrection after death. The first theme of our course, “In the Beginning,” explores these earliest religious rites and the beliefs that inspired them, right down to the time of the first farmers and the construction of the first megalithic monuments.

Next we devote six of our lectures to the ritual activity that seems to lie at the very core of religion worldwide—namely, burial of the dead, under the theme “Quest for the Afterlife.” Beginning with the simple pit tombs of ordinary villagers in predynastic Egypt, whose bodies were naturally mummified in the dry sand of the Sahara, we move forward in time to the extraordinary graves of wealthy monarchs like the Viking queen Åsa, whose elaborate, treasure-filled

tomb shows that at least some of our ancestors believed that you can take it with you. We also examine ambitious funeral architecture from Petra in Jordan to Easter Island in the Pacific and include a visit to the enigmatic burial mounds of prehistoric North America.

Another universal element in religion is ritual: the performance of traditional actions that range from dances to foretelling the future. Although such activities may seem ephemeral, they often leave clear traces in the archaeological record. Our third theme, “Reconstructing Ancient Rituals,” starts with a survey of the fertility cults of warriors and farmers in Bronze Age Scandinavia. Then we move on to Minoan bull dancing, Chinese and Greek divination, and Mayan ball games and human sacrifices. We conclude by examining a tour de force of scientific archaeology that has reconstructed, hour by hour, the last day in the life of a Celtic prince, possibly a Druid, who was sacrificed and buried in a bog at the time of the Roman conquest of Britain.

This grisly ritual leads us into our fourth theme, “Lost Gods and Fallen Temples,” where human sacrifice becomes almost routine as part of the nearly superhuman efforts to glorify divine monarchs through monumental architecture, impressive ceremony, and above all spectacular funeral rites. The kings and queens of Ur in Mesopotamia (hometown of the biblical Abraham), the pharaohs of Egypt, the emperors of China and Rome, and the royalty of the ancient Americas have all left indelible marks of their status as gods, rather than as mere mortals.

The penultimate theme of the course, “Sacred Landscapes,” offers a tour of some of earth’s most famous ancient sites: Stonehenge, Angkor Wat, Machu Picchu, and others. These great achievements of ancient engineers in fact functioned as ceremonial centers, and it is our mission to understand the full range of remains at each site and to reconstruct the religious beliefs and worldviews that impelled ancient peoples in every corner of the globe to invest such vast expenditures of time, wealth, human power, and technical ingenuity to create stages for their religious rites and earthly images of the sacred cosmos. We also explore lesser-known ceremonial centers such as Chaco Canyon in the American Southwest and the Ajanta Caves of India.

In our final group of six lectures, under the theme “Communities of the Spirit,” we consider a number of extinct religions in their totality.

The best known of these is unquestionably the early monotheistic cult of the heretic Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten, who closed the temples of Ra and the other traditional gods and tried to impose the worship of a single god, Aten, throughout his kingdom. Similar grandeur attends the discoveries of the center for Aztec religious life at the Templo Mayor in Mexico City (formerly the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán), where recent excavations have brought to light a series of pyramids, offerings, and artworks that span the entire period of Aztec domination in Mesoamerica. The search for the ancient Persian cult of Mithras takes us deep underground to the buried chapels of his worshippers throughout the Roman Empire, while the city of Jenne-jeno in Africa yields evidence of a cult in which craftworkers, specifically ironsmiths, were regarded as diviners and religious leaders. Finally, viewing earth from space, we close with the mystery of the Nazca Desert in Peru, where gigantic images of animals and other designs laid out over great distances still defy the efforts of archaeologists to unlock their secrets.

Although this course focuses primarily on religions that belong to the ancient world, we will often pause to consider how archaeological finds shed unexpected light on the origins and rituals of such modern religions as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Even today, most people’s religious experience is shaped not by theological creeds but by enduring traditions rooted in the remote past.

Lecture One

The Roots of Religious Experience

Scope:

Archaeology is the science of studying the past through its material remains. Religions may seem to center around theology, abstract beliefs, and codes of behavior, but the spiritual will inevitably be reflected in the physical world. The ways in which a people bury their dead, represent supernatural powers, ensure divine favor through offerings, and construct spaces for worship provide essential clues to their religious beliefs. To understand humanity, we must understand religion. Religious monuments often form the dominant element of a culture's remains. Archaeology provides the only surviving data about beliefs and rituals that developed during the ages preceding the invention of writing. Even for the historical period, excavations shed new light on aspects of religion that could never be known from written records. In this course we visit some of the most important sites around the globe in an exploration of the origins and development of religion.

Outline

- I. This course will explore the roots of modern world religions but will also study some of the earliest religious expressions of faiths long dead, which we can only learn about through their archaeological remains.
- II. Let's start by explaining what archaeologists do and how our work differs from that of other historians.
 - A. Archaeology is the science of studying the human past through its material remains: artifacts, buildings, sites, human remains, botanical and zoological remains, and alterations to the natural landscape.
 - B. Archaeologists collaborate with researchers in many fields to gain an interdisciplinary perspective on past cultures and civilizations, from the pollen in the air they breathed to the significance of the art they produced.

- C. For the entire span of human existence before the invention of writing, archaeology provides our only evidence for human history and culture, including the development and spread of religions.

III. Let me introduce myself and tell you about my archaeological training and the various experiences and discoveries that have made the study of ancient religions a major part of my career as a fieldworker and scholar.

- A. I grew up at the Falls of the Ohio River in New Albany, Indiana, on a hill where prehistoric hunters camped to watch for migrating bison herds preparing to ford the river. Ancient artifacts often turned up during construction projects or even just gardening in our neighborhood, and I became obsessed with the vestiges of the past worlds that lay hidden beneath our feet.
- B. These early experiences grew into training at Yale and Cambridge and a career as an archaeologist. I have had opportunities to survey and explore prehistoric mounds in the Ohio River Valley; Celtic rituals in England; sacred rock art in Scandinavia; pagan and Christian religious structures at a Roman villa in Portugal; and oracle sites in Greece, Turkey, and Albania.
- C. Reconstructing ancient religious rituals from their archaeological remains has become a central part of my life's work. Some of the sites we visit during this course were chosen because of my desire to share with you my personal experience.

IV. What are our goals? I have three; you may have additional goals of your own.

- A. First, we will approach our subject experientially, through visits to more than 30 important archaeological sites. Archaeology is visceral experience; I would like you to share in an encounter with the past that is as much physical as it is cerebral.
- B. Second, you should expect to acquire a mass of knowledge about ancient religions and religious sites—to become “literate” in the subject. Both modern archaeological research projects and the mass of evidence from the sites themselves will be given due attention.

- C. Finally, I hope you will come to the end of the course with a new view of religion and its role in human history: how it evolved, what its universal elements are, what aspects unify various religions throughout the world, and what aspects divide them—sometimes violently. It will be our mission to understand the spiritual force that drove people to these heroic achievements.

Suggested Reading:

Fagan, *From Black Land to Fifth Sun*.

Renfrew, *Before Civilization*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Would you expect the material remains of religion (sacred objects, places of worship, burials, and so on) to reflect the religious beliefs of its adherents directly?
2. Among contemporary religions, can you think of an example where material remains might seriously confuse archaeologists of the future?

Lecture One—Transcript

The Roots of Religious Experience

Hello and welcome to your course on the archaeology of religion. My name is John Hale. I'm an archaeologist at the University of Louisville in Kentucky. It's going to be my pleasure to be with you for these 36 lectures as we trace the development of religious beliefs and religious practices through some 40,000 years of history. We will explore the roots of modern world religions, but we will also be studying some of the earliest religious expressions of faiths long dead, which we can only learn about through their archaeological remains.

This is the archaeology of religion, not strictly the history of religion. I'd like to start by explaining what archaeologists do, and how our work differs from that of other historians. Archaeologists are interested in the material remains of the past; materials remains can be artifacts; buildings; marks on the landscape; human remains and the remains of the plants and animals that they've used; the debris from the industries and tool making and construction work. In addition to all this their religious remains.

Religion is going to generate traces in the archaeology record. In fact religion is almost sure to generate such traces because it involves such activities as burial of the dead, which is a sort of primeval religious act. In which a small archaeological site is created simply by that very customary act of placing the remains of the dead person underground, that stereotype that you may have of archaeologists deep in a trench with or without a pith helmet but armed with a marshal town trowel and scraping away at the soil is perfectly correct. That's what we do; most of us are diggers. I'm also a diver, I like to work underwater in the search for ancient ships, but in general archaeological work depends on the fact that things get buried. Things are left behind, covered over by windblown debris, or by the buildup from later habitations on the same site.

We're going to be visiting some towns, like Abraham's hometown of Ur in Mesopotamia, where an entire hill, an artificial mini-mountain has been created by layer upon layer, upon layer of decayed mud-brick city, sealing each older layer in and creating a mound that is like a book whose leaves can be turned as you peel back one layer after another, revealing the artifacts of the human remains inside.

We will in this course be bringing to bear on our material evidence everything we can from the world of theology; religious history; inscriptions; books; writings; studies of iconography—that's the study of art and what different symbols mean; and we'll also be getting into folklore, myth, oral traditions in our efforts to explain the material evidence. But for us the material evidence comes first and our initial attempt is always to explain it on its own terms, hoping to get an objective view to which we can then apply all that evidence from the more familiar branches of inquiry that are applied to religion and all other aspects of the human past.

Archaeologists resemble somewhat those CSI teams, those crime scene investigation teams, but instead of approaching a crime or trying to reconstruct an event by going around and interviewing people in which case you always know you will only get partial truths or slanted truths, or deliberately false representations on what went on we try to get to what we think of as more objective evidence. People may write inscriptions about their glorious deeds, or put very laudatory phrases on their tombstones that have no relationship to the truth. We are famous, we people, for misrepresenting what goes on making ourselves look good.

But we take very little care in how we throw away our kitchen garbage or the domestic arrangements of our homes—these things tend to preserve facts that are as I said objective. They are not being manipulated by the people of the time; they simply give us a real picture of what when on. So like a CSI investigator, we will be down on our hands and knees measuring footprints, to get the size and stride of ancient peoples; investigating the remains of their bodies, whether cremated or inhumated, buried in the flesh and with the skeleton there remaining in the ground. We'll try to reconstruct the lines of the people through scientific techniques. We will also look at what they created, both in terms of individual artifacts that would include religious images; symbolic amulets or charms or small figures that are carried around. Everything from that to gigantic towering statues of gods and goddesses and the huge temples in which to house them.

We're going to be looking at a series of sites, several dozen around the world, sites each of which I believe has something to tell us about the evolution of human religion through time. Some of these will be cave sites, some will be temple sites, some will be special

religious gathering places for ceremonies, some will be caves—which I think I said, some will be places where the future was consulted by divination and by working with an oracle, some site where it was believed just from the other side if you were there you could get in touch with the spirit world.

Most of these ceremonies, most of these ancient religious rituals, involved paraphernalia—special objects, special tools, sometimes weapons, ornaments that people would wear, special dress, head dresses, garments that showed they were taking part in a religious ritual, perhaps as a religious specialist. Instruments of music, since the ceremonies are often accompanied by music, by dance, by songs. All of this is accumulated in the ground.

That's especially true since most of the religions we will be looking at lie far back in the human past, and they have been overtaken by newer religions especially by what we call the “revealed faiths” or the “revealed religions,” these dominate our own religious world today. Religions like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism. These religions are founders; they are intellectual religions with creeds, books, and scriptures, as well as a mass of ritual. But behind them we get to those more primeval faiths and in many cases our own clue to those faiths are the archaeology remains—those material pieces of events that have happened long ago, where history can give us no help, because history is about documentation and most of human history happened before there was writing to record it. Archaeology is the bright light we can shine back into the past, in order to try to see all those ancient religious sites, understand the rituals that went on there, and by understanding the sites, the rituals, looking at the remains of the people and of the sacred objects, the way they buried their dead, the way that they arranged the sacred places, trying to pierce through that into the big question: What did they believe? What were the ideas that generate these ceremonies, that generate these sacred places, that created the need for sacred calendars—that might be marked by gigantic sites like Stonehenge that do not have a single word upon them and yet act as astronomical observatories for marking important points in the sacred calendar.

We can already tell we're going to be visiting some extraordinary places, and this course is meant to be an experience. Archaeology is a visceral experience; we deal with the physical world and physical evidence. I want you to enjoy our travels as we go to these sites in

our imaginations and experience what it is like to stand on the banks of the Nile and look west through the gap between two of the pyramids on the Giza plateau and watch that sun dipping below the western horizon, seeing it as a beautiful natural scene, but realizing that to an Egyptian it carried tremendous symbolic and religious meaning. Or standing on top of the Acropolis in Athens, not among crowds of tourists with guides telling us what ruin we are looking at but at a time when it was the center of a number of religious cults—the cult of the Greek goddess Athena, principle among them—but full of life, full of offerings, full of processions, and grand celebrations and animals being brought up to the altars, and people in elaborate clothing, that sacred place that seems so desolate today.

Our travels will take us to Mexico and Peru, and the Mississippi and Ohio river valleys here in the new world, and also to sites in China, India, southeast Asia, Africa, we are going to try to have a global tour that will explore as many parts of the world as possible so our picture will be as complete as possible. We are also going to try to go back in time even beyond the beginning of our modern human species and look at Neanderthals and their religious rituals to try to get to the very bedrock, digging down, and down, and down through our levels of history and prehistory to where it all began.

Now, how did I get into this field? I am an archaeologist. I was trained in archaeology, unlike most of my colleagues who came up through the field of Anthropology, that's study of human culture. I'm an archeologist from the start, undergraduate and graduate. And so I see archeology very much as an independent field, a field that stands mid-way between social sciences like anthropology or religious studies on the one hand; and humanities like art history, history, and philosophy on the other hand; and finally between all those and the natural sciences: Geology so we can understand the rocks and the earth that creates those sites. Biology so that we can study the human remains, the remains of the plants and animals on which our ancestors depended on for their life, and also all of those biological materials that are going to end up being an important part of religious observances. We're interested in chemical analysis, physical analysis both for analyzing remains and for dating them.

By taking a course on archaeology you are entering a world where most of the academy, most of all modern scholastic and scientific inquiry finds a central place, because by looking at the past through

the lens of archaeology you are in fact finding facets of that lens that touch upon many other subjects and depend upon scholars in many other disciplines. I love that, I love that my subject brings me together with other scholars in big multi-discipline teams. Some of those multi-disciplinary teams that I've been lucky enough to work with have been involved in the study of ancient religion and have been able to answer questions that eluded recent researchers who just approach the problem from the angle of one discipline. The largest part of my career that has overlapped with this field of archaeology of religion has been the study of oracles, oracle sites that were created by the ancient Greeks.

It began at the most famous site of all: Delphi on the slopes of Mt. Parnassus in central Greece. I was lucky enough to encounter a geologist, Jelle de Boer, of Wesleyan University who seemed to me to have wrong ideas about the ancient oracles. He had based his ideas on what he had seen on the site, in terms of geological features, and what he had read about in ancient sources about there being a natural crack in the rock and a vapor or fume that came out with intoxicating properties that gave the oracle—the woman who sat there above the cleft in the earth and the temple of Apollo—an oracular trance. Well the ancients had said this but modern archaeological wisdom said that there is no cleft in the earth the rock seems unbroken, we are going to say that that is one of those things that is a false tradition a myth. He convinced me that he had seen a geological fault forming under the temple, we went, we not only found that fault but another and the gases and fumes that came out of them. We will be talking about that in detail when we get to our Greek oracle sites for this course, the site of Klaros, at a Greek city in Asia Minor, modern Turkey.

That was a great experience for me, but it was simply one in a series of encounters with the religion of the past that drew me step by step into a position of feeling that people have not paid enough attention to religion when they consider ancient societies. Now you're asking yourself, well how can that be? Think of the Egyptologist, they will spend a lot of there time talking to you about the religion, that's true but the sense that I am trying to talk here is the sense of an overarching meaning and assessment of the role religion played in ancient times in a cross cultural sense, among all ancestral groups.

I've been lucky enough to work at religious sites in the Ohio river valley, I worked for a while with the University of Louisville Archeology survey trying to rescue sites along the Ohio river valley, especially prehistoric ones that stood in the way of bulldozers and modern process. We would try to save village sites, tomb sites, places of worship—I can remember the time when just in front of a bulldozer some of my colleagues uncovered the tomb of a shaman, medicine man of probably about 3,000 years back. There in the tomb were not only the bones of the man, but his rattle—that sacred music maker that he had used during his rituals to call up the spirits and to work himself into that trance in which he could pass into the next world. We know a lot about shamans from modern parallels among tribal peoples, but here was one from long ago right where I live. The rattle itself was fantastic object the leg bone of a bear, the rattle was formed by a tortoise shell, and inside was perfect white pebbles that were taken from my own Ohio River and placed inside to make music all those centuries ago.

I passed from just working my own home area, into work overseas. I was lucky enough to get a place as a digger during my undergraduate days. During a summer at a site up in northern England, a place called Dragonby, a site where the roman remains—the time when Britannia was the province of the Roman Empire—overlaid an earlier Celtic village, where the religion had been the religion of the druids, who I had read all about and was very excited to encounter. We found what we will see later in the course, may have been the remains of a druidic sacrifice of a child. I am sorry to say that human sacrifice is something we are going to be encountering regularly in this course, as we look at what our ancestors did through the ages.

I got into the world of ancient Rome in a deeper way in Portugal, during a multi-year dig in a Roman villa in Portugal. Roman villas were the ancestors of modern plantations, of haciendas, ranches. But in addition to being big economic agricultural engines, they were places of hope, places of worship, at the village where I was working with colleagues from the University of Louisville; we found the remains of two competing religious systems.

The old original Roman system with a grand altar to the god Mars with the name of the first builder of the villa written on it. He was probably a regional officer in the roman legions who was being paid off by the emperor with this land grand way out there in the west in

the province of Lusitania, modern Portugal. Here was the alter in marble that he had set up to his god, Mars. But it wasn't in its original place when we found it. It had been uprooted, built into a wall of a new Christian complex, which dated all the way back into the 4th century of our era and produced one of the earliest Basilica churches ever excavated in western Europe.

This idea not just individual religions being of great interest but that the sequence of religions, that the collisions between religions, could be best studied through archaeology really took hold of me. And really became a defining part of my entire career as an archaeologist, putting me a little bit a part from most of my colleagues. At the University of Louisville, I developed a course called Archaeology of Religion; I found it was extremely popular with students who wanted to get beyond theologies, and creeds, and religious arguments about what it was right to believe—or as we Americans often say, believe in—and get back to what are the common threads, the common roots, that the world's religions seem to share in terms of veneration of the dead; beliefs about a divine or supernatural world; and common rituals, common ceremonies, common observances—the belief that certain places can be made sacred and that certain times can be designated as sacred times.

All of this provides a great unifying force within religion that is, I feel, too often ignored and I think students are very eager to find out about what these religions have in common not in the sense of theological principles but in the sense of everyday experiences for ordinary people like ourselves who approach these great temples, these massive sacred sites like Stonehenge, or these images of gods, what was it like—the feeling of awe, the feeling of being in the presence of the supernatural, and the feeling that through the proper ceremonies and offerings one could put oneself right with the world, one could ensure that the good things in life continued. All of this seemed to be recurring again and again along with some very specific symbols and practices. It became a cause for me; something that I wanted to add to the discourse that was held at every university about what's important in this world.

I feel that religion is a neglected part of this and that approaching it through archeology, through the study of material remains that often emphasizes commonalities things that are shared between different religions can be extremely enlightening both as we study those

ancient religions and as we think about the religious life of our own time. We are all aware to the extent that perhaps wasn't true 100 years ago, religion is dominated politics; international divisions between nations and peoples; and promoting wars, promoting bloodshed, promoting a sense of violence in the world rather than the peace that if one reads through the theological books and creeds seems to be at the heart of each religion's desire for the world. I've always felt that if we could trace our way back to where it began and follow it from the beginning we would get some insights into how we got to where we are today.

Now, the first person to make an effort to do this, to use archaeology as a tool to answer question about religion is somebody you are very familiar with, though you probably did not realize he was America's first archeologist. He is Thomas Jefferson. The framer of the Constitution, the second president of the United States, founder of the University of Virginia, which he was proud to point out on his tombstone, and a man of a very restless inquiring imagination and mind who wanted to look into everything.

In the 1780s, Thomas Jefferson carried out a very formal and unprecedented for America at the time, excavation on a religious monument. It was a mound on his property, on the banks of a little Virginia river, called the Rivanna. There were many theories floating around about that mound and others like it, it was a sort of haystack shaped mound of earth and it was part of a class of objects in the landscape that stretched way over the Alleghenies and Appalachians into the Ohio and Mississippi valleys, which were just being explored. Reports came back of not just individual mounds but entire mound cities, giant platform, and pyramid mounds that stretched across the landscape. Who made these mounds? This was the question. And why were they made? What's their purpose? Thomas Jefferson decided to try to answer those two questions.

Now as for who made them, it was a very popular conception then that's still with us today that there had been a lost race of mound builders that came to these shores here in America and created these mounds. This lost race was summoned up to explain something that didn't seem to fit with the pioneers and the colonists view of the Native America tribes they encountered. They were in fact taking land away from these tribes, any ascription to these tribes of real civilized values or achievements would make it less easy to justify

that taking of the land on which, let's face it the United States was founded. And certainly to grant them the powers of having created entire cities, laying things out to the cardinal points of the compass, and constructing huge earth works that would have taken years to build and harvest the energy of whole communities, and required scientists and architects to lay out in their neat geometrical patterns, this didn't seem appropriate. So this lost race concept, this lost race myth, was conjured up where people from the Vikings, to the Phoenicians, to the lost tribes of Israel, to Siberian Tartars just about anybody rather than the ancestors of the local tribes was summoned up in a legendary kind of way, and claimed to have created the mounds. A variant of the lost race, and one that I'm sorry to say was espoused by none other than Benjamin Franklin, was that the Spanish conquistadors making their way, in some cases unchartered and unrecorded, through the land occupied by the 13 colonies and then by the young United States had in fact in the 1500s stopped overnight and built earth works as temporary camps and forts, just as the roman legions were known to have done.

All these things were something that could only be tested by digging into a mound and seeing what was inside and then there were theories that if it was burial mound, then looking after all many had been plowed flat and had yielded bones and artifacts. What kind of a burial was it? A single king inside, like a pharaoh in his great pyramid over in Egypt? Or was it a place where warriors who died on a battlefield and there remains were all piled together there in the mound? Or was it a place where a village had carried its dead and entered them and through time the mound growing with successive deaths and successive burials? Thomas Jefferson went to the mound, had the workers who were the slaves of African decent from his plantation come and cut a slice from the mound and in this way they became the first archaeologist in American history, because in that slice they were able to answer all those questions about the background of the mound, its religious function and the truth or falsehood of the quasi-religious myth about a lost race that had come here built the mounds and disappeared.

What was discovered by Thomas Jefferson was first of all one could forget the lost race theory, everything in the mound and this was proven to be true for all such mounds and earthworks in America, was a local Native American manufacturer. There were no European or exotic or Phoenician artifacts inside the mound. And second, there

were not just male burials in the mound with weapons, this was not a tomb of warriors, it was not an individual chief, king's burial place with treasures inside, it was the ordinary burial place of a community: men, women, and children.

Small everyday artifacts were put in the tombs showing that they pictured a life in which the dead would travel to another land where they would need all the implements that they had in the earthly existence in that new spiritual existence. Thomas Jefferson sealed up the mound and wrote up his report which is an essential element of archeology—to report on what you find. If you had not done that you are nothing but a looter yourself. In this way he carried out the first example of archeology in America, but more important for our purposes the first example of religious archeology. Archeology of religion, archeology aimed at determining the truth or falsehood of different theories about ancient religious monuments and the beliefs behind them. He's a real pioneer for us.

We are going to way beyond what Thomas Jefferson was trying to do, he did it the right way, one site, one set of questions, one clear focus on answering a problem or testing a hypothesis as we like to say, that made it possible for him to add a very solid stone to the edifice of that great monument of science which is devoted to understanding the ideas and principles that drove our ancestors in their lives to create all these various things.

Our mission is different; we are trying to do a great synthesis of as many great religious sites as we can cover; of as wide a variety of sites as we can cover, through as many periods and in as many different lands as we are able to visit in our 36 lectures. We are going to be visiting sites that you know well such as the pyramids of Giza, or the great temple at Angkor in Cambodia known to all from so many images, Machu Picchu in Peru; but also sites very obscure very little known such as the rock art sites of southern Scandinavia.

But they all have something in common; they are all pieces of a mosaic that we can put together to create a worldwide picture of what religion has been, how it has generated physical remains in the ground, for us as archeologists to recover and analyze and interpret; and finally having created that picture through the mosaic realizing that there are different ways to assemble all of those pieces trying to bring it to life; trying to use what we know about human religions from text and from oral traditions, to breath life into these dusty and

dead remains of a remote past. It's going to be an exciting trip, I'm glad you have decided to make the journey with me and I look forward to meeting you at our first site, in our next lecture. We are going to Kurdistan, to the side of a mountain into a great cave called Shanidar, where we will get back to a very earliest roots of religious practice. I will see you there.

Lecture Two

Neanderthal Burials at Shanidar

Scope:

When Ralph Solecki of Columbia University and his wife Rose began to excavate at Shanidar Cave in 1951, the scholarly image of Neanderthals conformed to a caveman stereotype of brutish behavior and subhuman mental capacity. In levels that dated back to the Middle Paleolithic (more than 35,000 years ago), however, the Soleckis discovered that the Neanderthals had deliberately buried their dead in pits, curling the body into a fetal position and sometimes placing a stone slab over the grave. This revolutionary discovery remains the earliest incontrovertible religious site in the world. Much more controversial has been the Soleckis' conclusion, based on pollen analysis, that Neanderthals placed their dead on soft beds of pine branches and filled the tombs with flowers. Evidence for Neanderthal cave shrines, skull cults, and worship of animal deities also remains hotly disputed.

Outline

- I. First, let's look at the roadmap for the course so you understand where these lectures are going and how they fit together.
 - A. The course is divided into six groups of six lectures each.
 - B. The first set is called "In the Beginning." It includes the introduction and the exploration of a series of sites that carry us back into the Stone Age.
 - C. In this set of lectures, we will discuss what kind of religious impulses come to us out of the period known as the Paleolithic.
- II. Neanderthals were both very much like us and different from us.
 - A. We know about Neanderthals because of a series of discoveries of complete Neanderthal skeletons.
 - B. Neanderthals would have been shorter than we are, but their brains would have been the same size as ours, though arranged differently.

- C. We know Neanderthals were much stronger than we are from the density of their bones, the mass of their long bones, and the large attachments for their muscles.
 - D. They also were extremely agile and swift on rough terrain, based on the massive strength that their skeletons reveal.
- III. The shambling, dull-witted Neanderthal stereotype was promoted in the early 20th century.
 - A. Neanderthals were discovered in 1848 by British soldiers, working in the caves of Gibraltar.
 - B. In the 1850s, workers in the Neander Valley of Germany uncovered an old rock shelter where they found some unusual-looking humanoid bones.
 - C. In the early 1900s, an archaeologist working at a rock shelter in France found a skeleton of a Neanderthal on a bed of flint flakes with a hand resting near a beautiful axe.
 1. The skeleton was arranged in the form of what is called a flexed burial, which looks like the fetal position.
 2. The Neanderthals may have felt that this position was appropriate to someone going back into the womb of the earth.
 3. The discovery caused a sensation because up until the early 20th century, no one believed such human forebears had religion.
 - D. Even as these discoveries were being made, Marcellin Boule took a very complete adult male Neanderthal skeleton from a rock shelter in the Dordogne Valley and clothed it in flesh, skin, and animal skins, creating the stereotype of the caveman.
 - IV. Decades later, along came a husband and wife team, Ralph and Rose Solecki.
 - A. In the 1950s, prehistorians were beginning to bring analytical techniques and scientific methods of the hard sciences to their study of early humans. Ralph was one of those pioneering archaeologists.
 - B. Between 1951 and 1960, the Soleckis carried out a number of field seasons in Shanidar Cave in northern Iraq. They discovered not only the remains of thousands of tools but the skeletons of nine Neanderthal individuals.

- C. Ralph found the Shanidar 1 burial and worked out a very interesting scenario for the burial.
 - 1. He was amazed when the bones were studied later and it turned out that this individual had many congenital disabilities.
 - 2. From the obvious care taken with his burial, Ralph concluded that these were people of compassion.
- D. In the Shanidar 4 burial, a palynologist found pockets of pollen that belonged to seven different early-summer-flowering plants that may have been bouquets woven into garlands around pine branches for the tomb.
- E. Based on findings from Shanidar 4, Solecki felt that everything he had thought about Neanderthals had been turned on its head.
 - 1. They were people who buried their dead not only with honor but with flowers, symbols of resurrection.
 - 2. Interestingly, a number of those plants are medicinal.
- V. Shanidar entered the world of popular culture in Jean Auel's novel *Clan of the Cave Bear*.
 - A. The novel shows a group of people very different from us physically, somewhat different from us culturally, and yet united to us and maybe even anterior to us, preceding us in the area of religious ritual, religious belief, and symbolic religious behavior.
 - B. A part of the "cultural DNA" of the Shanidar burials has been handed down to us: a belief in something that transcends this earthly existence.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. What were your preconceptions about Neanderthals or prehistoric humans in general?
- 2. Would you agree that religious ideas about death and the afterlife form a logical "first step" in the development of religion?

Lecture Two—Transcript

Neanderthal Burials at Shanidar

Welcome back. Before we explore our next case study—our site at Shanidar Cave in Iraq that represents possibly the first and oldest documented burial and the ritual that went along with it—I'd like to give you a little bit of a roadmap to the course so you understand where these lectures are going and how they fit together. I've divided our course into six groups, or sessions, of six lectures each. I've entitled this first set of six, "In the Beginning." It began with the introduction, which we've already had, and it's going to go on to a series of sites that carry us back into remote prehistory, back into the Stone Age. When we come to our lecture on the Scandinavian rock art, we're going to be talking about the invention by Scandinavians of a three-age system of human prehistory, the three ages being based on technology and tool materials, so that they are the Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age. We use that designation "Stone Age," or its Archaeological equivalent: Old Stone Age, Paleolithic; Middle Stone Age, Mesolithic; New Stone Age, when farming and pottery and urbanism appear, Neolithic—New Stone Age.

We use those terms to divide up prehistory and its long phases all over the world; but by far the longest is the Paleo—"old"—lithic Stone Age, Paleolithic. This goes from at least two-million years ago with the first stone tools. If you've read about the Leakeys in Olduvai Gorge, you may remember that they were finding stone tools even before they found the fossil remains of the bones of those who had created them. These Oldowan tools, named after Olduvai Gorge, went back a couple of million years into the past, way before there were modern humans like us on the scene. That stone tool tradition was based mainly around tools that you could flake, that you could strike and shape by knapping as it's called—K-N-A-P-P-I-N-G—knapping stones like flint and chert and quartz into the shapes of scrapers, blades, axes. That tradition lasted the longest. In fact, we're only a few thousand years before the present, before the polished stone tools come in, before the ground stone tools with the granites and the other igneous rocks are ground and shaped into axes and other very hard, very durable tools. All of that comes very late.

There are many ways of expressing the remote past of human history and the immense length of human history. But, most of that duration—

when we have people with recognizably human-type cultures and technologies based on tools and living together in groups, mastering technologies like fire—most of that is this Paleolithic.

We're going to have a few lectures now on what kind of religious impulses come to us out of this Paleolithic: a time when there were no farmers, when there were no harvester, when there were no people managing nature. This was a time when our ancestors and forebears lived in a world in which they had to live on nature's terms, as hunters of animals, as gatherers of wild plants. That is the world of the Paleolithic. That is the world into which we are going now with this lecture, which is about an extraordinary discovery in Shanidar Cave of a group of deliberate burials that were made by a people whose exact position relative to us is still debated: the people we call Neanderthals.

Neanderthals are certainly very like us. If you were to dress a Neanderthal in a tie and a suit or a dress and heels, that Neanderthal man, that Neanderthal woman, could probably pass muster on a subway without causing a riot. But, in some ways, they were different. We know Neanderthals because of a series of discoveries of complete Neanderthal skeletons. These discoveries we owe, in part, to the fact that Neanderthals did deliberately bury their dead, often in caves. That they were living in caves, that they gave rise in some ways to that stereotype of the caveman as our prehistoric ancestor.

Let me quickly give you the image of a Neanderthal, and then we're going to go back to some of those caves, study the discoveries, look at the controversy that's come out of them, and then we will move to our special focus site for this lecture: Shanidar Cave in northern Iraq. Neanderthals would have been shorter than we are, but their brains would have been the same size. They were arranged differently, however: the crania were low, and at the back of the skull there was a thing called an occipital bun. We don't know what the brain in there was doing. In other words, there's the same quantity of brain, but it's arranged differently. If that has a meaning as far as a different set of abilities that we don't have, and maybe a lack of some of the abilities we do have, the cerebral cortex, which is what forms the high dome of your own skull is your analytical computer. It is possible that the Neanderthal brain didn't have quite the same, let's say, computational skills that we have—analytical skills, problem-solving skills. We're not sure. They, on the other hand, may have had in that occipital bun,

that extension of the skull back toward the rear, abilities and capacities that are lost to us. We just don't know.

Now Neanderthals were much stronger than we are physically. We know from the density of the bone, the mass of the long bones, the large attachments for muscles that Neanderthals would have swept the board in many of the strength competitions at the Olympics. If there had been a competition for running at high speed over very rough and uneven terrain, they would have won that too. They were extremely agile, it would appear, and extremely swift on that kind of rough terrain based on the massive strength that their skeletons reveal; but this was not always recognized. A very different view of the shambling, dull-witted Neanderthal was promoted in the early 20th century, and I'd like to explain where that came from.

Neanderthals were in fact discovered—although no one knew what name to put on them—way back in 1848. British soldiers working in the caves of Gibraltar uncovered a skull that looked sort of human, but sort of apelike because there was a big massive brow ridge and the skull was low, and the bone was thick. If you go to Gibraltar today and go to one of those caves, you'll still see a little exhibit in a niche behind glass that is a cast of that first skull that was found there at Gibraltar. [The year] 1848 was too early for such a discovery to be made and have an impact on thinking. In scientific circles, the idea of earlier versions, or relatives of modern humans, just wasn't around yet. It had to wait until the 1850s, when workers in the Neander Valley of Germany, the river valley near Düsseldorf. By the way, German for valley is T-H-A-L, "thal." Neanderthal is the way you say in German the location of where these workers, working on a cliff face and getting out a clay deposit, uncovered an old rock shelter. In that rock shelter were the bones, the skeletons, of somebody. When the bones were looked at, the differences between those skeletons and those of modern people made the folks looking at them think, "These are people who are deformed, or they're from some other part of the world."

When more and more of these started to appear, it was realized that we were looking at a group that had lived in the remote past but no longer lived today. Now an archaeological supernova of the first magnitude exploded in the early 1900s when an archaeologist working at a rock shelter in France called Le Moustier found a skeleton of a Neanderthal on a bed of flint flakes with a hand resting

near a beautiful axe. That skeleton was arranged as the archaeologist said, "as if the man were asleep." With his hand tucked under his head, the other hand reaching for the axe, and the knees doubled up in a flexed position. These were called flexed burials.

All of our Neanderthal burials are going to be flexed burials on their side. We also think of that as the fetal position. We're familiar with the fetal position from all those anatomy textbook images. We're not 100 percent clear that our ancestors would have known how a fetus was arranged in the womb. Yet certainly, if you think of the way babies come out with the knees drawn up and the legs very short in proportion, they may have felt in some way that this fetal position was appropriate to someone going back into the womb of the earth and returning, in a way, to the earth from which we have all come.

At any rate, this caused a sensation because the idea of religion had been denied to these human forebears up until the early 20th century. The idea that they could be thinking, sentient, caring, feeling, imaginative, people with a strong spiritual sense was something that was not accepted very quickly until more and more and more of these burials began to be found. Some of them were bones which had been marked with red ochre. Now red ochre is an iron oxide which gives you a red pigment, a bright brick—bright blood red color used all over the world in religious ceremonies, but going back to these Neanderthal people.

There were other burials that showed them buried with tools, buried with personal possessions, buried in groups, buried with ritual objects like a little ring of goats' horns, the horns of wild goats around a child. That was in Uzbekistan. Most of them did come from France and from Italy and from western Europe; that seemed to be a major Neanderthal stronghold. Ultimately, radio carbon dates in the second half of the 20th century were to show that the Neanderthals belonged to the Ice Age and that they dominated in a period before modern humans, our direct ancestors, were creating the fabulous art in the caves of the Ice Age. That will be the subject of the next lecture when we talk about the creation of sacred spaces.

These Neanderthals came on the scene some time before 100,000 years ago and were still around at about 35,000 years ago. At that point, they disappear from the archaeological record. Optimists think that they interbred in a friendly and collegial way with our ancestors and simply became merged into the gene pool. That idea has been

knocked on the head by very recent DNA studies, which suggest that although they did not differ from humans very much in the way of their chemical and genetic makeup, nonetheless, we were not directly related, and we are not their descendants.

Even as these discoveries were being made—around the beginning of the 20th century before the time of the First World War, that suggested another group of human-like people, called by that river valley in Germany, where the skeletons had been found in the 1850s, the Neanderthals—even as that idea was coming forward, a very different vision of the Neanderthals took over. It was created by a French scholar named Marcellin Boule, who took a very complete adult male Neanderthal skeleton from a rock shelter in the Dordogne Valley, in France. It is called La Chapelle-aux-Saints, the "Chapel of the Saints," because in medieval times it had been used as a Christian place of worship. It's interesting to see the continuity over 40,000 or 45,000 years between its use as a Neanderthal burial place and its use as a Christian chapel. At any rate, Boule took those bones and he put them together to create a complete skeleton. He clothed that skeleton in flesh, skin, and animal skins and created the stereotype of the caveman.

Boule noticed a deformation of the ankles and the bones of the feet in his adult male Neanderthal, and he decided that meant that Neanderthals had walked on the outside of their feet. Now you may be familiar with certain monkeys and apes that do this when they're on the ground. They are animals that are used to clutching branches with their feet, just as we can still do with our hands. The curves led to a walk, a gait, in which the weight is on the outside of the feet, but it creates a sort of shambling walk. Boule decided that the knees were permanently bent, that these tipped forward, that the arms hung loose in front and that with his head tilted forward like this, it probably would not have been able to speak. Based on his reading of the skeletal remains of that one individual, he emphasized all the things that seemed to him most beast-like, most ape-like about Neanderthal. You can go to museums all over the world and see staring at you, out of glass cases, someone who looks like this only with a completely vacant expression.

That became one stereotype of the Neanderthal. It became so dominant that people forgot about or explained away all the evidence from those different cave sites and rock shelters that in fact they had

been people with a very strong religious-developed sense of their own.

Decades passed, along came a husband and wife team, surname Solecki, who worked at Columbia University in New York City, Ralph and Rose Solecki. Ralph had taken up a position there in the department of anthropology, but he had background in the natural sciences. He had worked on the Arctic Slope, up in northwest Alaska. He'd done geological studies. He was used to thinking in terms of environments. [The year] 1950 was about the time that all over the world prehistorians were beginning to bring to their study of early human, a whole battery of analytical techniques and scientific methods of the hard sciences, the natural sciences of biology and of geology and environmental studies. Solecki was at the forefront of this. He was one of those pioneering archaeologists in the 1950s who collaborated with natural scientists. We're going to see that in the case of the natural scientists as a palynologist—you probably didn't know you could grow up to be that. It's a person who is an expert on the pollen of plants. By looking at remains of pollen—new or old—under a microscope, they can reconstruct for you all the plants that were in a landscape at a given time in the past and from that, therefore, re-create the environment.

Well this palynology proved to be very important, but he didn't realize that at the time, he was simply doing what he thought was right. He was trying to incorporate in his study of early humans and early human cousins and ancestors, all the natural sciences that could help re-create their world. Now he had gotten interested in Neanderthal. He had in his younger days published some very critical articles about Neanderthal and their limited capabilities. He was certainly one who had followed Boule in thinking that they were mighty sub-human, these Neanderthals. He wanted to study them more, and he wanted to find more dead Neanderthals, he wanted to find the skeletons as well as the tools. The tools were named after that first rock shelter, Le Moustier, they were called Mousterian tools.

The Mousterian tool tradition, or industry as we call it in archaeological terms, consist of taking chunks of flint and knapping blades and flakes from that core until you reduce it down to just a little nub. The nub will be left with all the marks on it of where those flakes were taken off. The flakes themselves can be turned into scrapers, into blades, into knives, into all kinds of puncturing,

cutting, slicing, and scraping tools. It was a butchering tool kit for going after game; the Neanderthals were certainly hunters. That is the distinctive set of Mousterian tools always found in Neanderthal sites and especially those caves we talked about in France.

Ralph Solecki with Rose—young people in love—wanted to go and look for sites that hadn't been explored, that would extend the knowledge of Neanderthals. They heard a report from a very eminent prehistorian, her name was Dorothy Garrod. She was Cambridge University's—my alma mater—first female professor. Her field of prehistory had drawn together the natural sciences with the study of the human past, and she had gone over to pursue the human story in the Near East, where in the years after World War I, the 1920s. Professor Garrod had gone over into the territory of modern Iraq. It was then a British protectorate up near the headwaters of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, up near a place called the lesser and greater Zab rivers that were tributaries of the Tigris, looking for traces of ancient peoples, prehistoric communities. She had seen on an alluvial fan, one of these washes that comes down from the hills and may bring down artifacts from all kinds of places. You certainly have found things in a secondary place of deposit when you are on such alluvial soils. She had found artifacts of the Mousterian tradition. She knew there were Neanderthals up in those hills.

Ralph Solecki heard about her discoveries, met her, went over, and looked for himself. Starting in 1951, they carried out a number of field seasons, between 1951 and '60, in the biggest cave in the region, a place called Shanidar Cave. Very difficult to access, lying up in Kurdistan, the country of the Kurds, and actually in Shanidar itself in that cave, home to a number of Kurdish families. The cave was so big, so cathedral like, with its giant triangular opening, 26 feet high to the apex of the gothic-style arch that led into the cave, and 80 feet broad at the base of the opening. By the time you had gone just a little way into the cave itself, it was twice that high and twice that broad. Some Kurdish families, first taking refuge from their Ottoman oppressors and later from the very dictatorial government in Baghdad—when Iraq became a nation in its own right—they had formed a little community back there. But Ralph Solecki suspected that that would be a spot that these Mousterian tool-using Neanderthals would have lived.

In their four field seasons, they discovered not only the remains of thousands of the tools, they discovered a treasure trove of Neanderthal skeletons. Nine burials, nine individuals were found. Some of them were accidentally buried by falls of rock from the cave roof because Shanidar Cave lies right on a geological fault. You can see it in front of the cave. It's up in the Zagros Mountains, that extraordinarily important mountain range for human history where agriculture, the domestication of plants and domestication of animals is documented almost earlier than anywhere else in the world, a range of mountains that runs east/west along the Iraqi-Turkish border and then angles to run northwest/southeast along the Iraq-Iran border. We're up at the nodal meeting places of history as well as a good place to find Neanderthals.

Solecki found this "Shanidar 1" as he called it, this adult male, in one of the early field seasons. He worked out a very interesting scenario for the burial. That's what we archaeologists do: We find a lot of clues and then like CSI detective teams, we try to analyze and interpret those clues to come up with a scenario of what could have created that situation in the ground. What appeared to him to have been the case was this: A 40-year-old Neanderthal man—and by the way, this does sort of contradict that old dictum of Thomas Hobbes' that the life of early humans was nasty, brutish, and short. Here's a 40-year-old; they're certainly not dying in their very early years. He'd been standing in the cave when he was hit by a rock fall and died.

His friends, or somebody, had come back shortly after that, had a created a little cairn, an arrangement of stones over the body. By the way, we in common English, only use that word "cairn" when it's followed by the word "terrier" for the kind of dog that in England was sent into the rocks of ancient cairns, ancient Stone Age burial mounds in England, to look for rats and other small game. This cairn was arranged over this Shanidar 1 male, his crushed body. Then somebody came back, his friends presumably or his family, and they built a fire on top of that. They had a meal, perhaps the first funeral feast. When we get to our lecture on the beautiful site of Petra, in Jordan, we'll talk about the idea of feasting with the dead. They'd left some of the bones around. Then they'd apparently thrown earth on the whole site while the fire was still burning because the soil was burned red from a fire. The only way to get earth red is to throw it into the fire. Just building a campfire on the ground won't burn the earth below it because the heat goes up.

From all these clues, from his natural history as geological background, this is the scenario that Ralph Solecki came up with. He was amazed when the bones were studied later, back in the lab, and it turned out that this individual had been someone very different from the standard Neanderthal. He had what was called a withered arm at that time; but it was more than just the arm. The scapula or shoulder blade on the right side, the right clavicle, the right humerus or upper arm, these were all deformed. They had not grown. They had not developed in a normal way. The lower arm and hand were missing altogether. This was an individual, who in the rough and tumble world of a Neanderthal hunting camp, couldn't have contributed much, and probably could not have looked after himself. Yet he had lived to the age of 40 being looked after by others. From this, Solecki drew the conclusion these are people of compassion. This is not a competitive animal-like world. These are people who look out for each other and who perform ceremonies when they lose a loved one.

But, the ceremony that was going to take the world by storm didn't happen until later on in their years of digging at Shanidar. They found another a burial—they called this one Shanidar 4—which consisted of a male flexed, like those early ones in France. Flexed on his left side, arms folded, the knees drawn up against the chest. He was tucked into a little area between some rocks. They lifted the skeletal material and then did something that Solecki had been doing everywhere in the cave, took samples of the soil. Everywhere they went, they were taking samples of the soil in order to have a record of what the cave was made of. They were aware, for instance, that rodents were burrowing through the cave. They wanted to be able to tell the recent rodent burrows or the ancient rodent burrows from the natural soil itself as it had been left undisturbed.

It was eight years before a palynologist got around to analyzing that soil from the area of the grave at Shanidar, the burial that the Soleckis had designated Shanidar 4. The palynologist worked in Paris. Her name was Madame Arlette Leroi-Gourhan. We will meet her husband, André Leroi-Gourhan, in our next lecture because he's an expert on Paleolithic cave art and its interpretation. Arlette was a hard scientist, she was studying that pollen. She finally got out the samples of soil from Shanidar 4. She looked at one after another—there were three—every one of them was yellow with pollen. Pollen in such quantities, it was clear did not blow into the cave like the rest of the pollen she'd seen from Shanidar, mixed with all the other

pollens of the landscape. There were pockets of pollen that belonged to hollyhocks. There were pockets that belonged to grape hyacinth. There were pockets that belonged to yellow yarrow. There were pockets that belonged to horsetail. Seven different early summer flowering plants were represented in that mass along with evidence for pine branches.

Arlette got in touch with Solecki, she couldn't believe it. She said, "are you sure that this is a Neanderthal burial?" He said yes. She said, "I think I can even see some of the sort of enclosures of the flower that held the pollen together, as if they were brought in bunches, as if they were brought into bouquets, woven into garlands around those pine branches, and placed in the tomb. Ralph Solecki felt that everything he'd thought about Neanderthals had been turned on its head. They were people who buried their dead not only with honor, but with flowers, symbols of resurrection. The flower must die for the seed to be created and symbols, in a way, of a people's sense of the beautiful and of caring for a loved one as if he were still alive. Something we're certainly trying to do in our own modern burial services when the dead are arrayed on beds of satin and kept warm and comfortable for the next world.

One of the most interesting things to note is that a number of those plants—like the althea, the hollyhock, the ephedra, the horsetail, and even the yarrow, the *achillea*—these are medicinal plants. Shanidar was taken out and put into the world of popular culture when a novelist named Jean Auel, who'd studied with archaeologists and, in my opinion, did enough research for several doctoral dissertations, put it into her novel, *Clan of the Cave Bear*, as the clan's cave. She put these Shanidar burials, mixing the flower burial together with the burial of the man of the deformed arm, into one burial with the idea of showing a group of people very different from us physically, somewhat different from us culturally, and yet united to us and maybe even anterior to us, preceding us in the area of religious ritual, religious belief, and symbolic religious behavior. What's the date of the Shanidar burials? Forty-five thousand years ago. Even at that remote distance, part of the DNA, culturally speaking, that is going to be handed down to our own world from our prehistoric forebears is a belief in something that transcends this earthly existence.

Lecture Three

Hunting Magic in Sacred Caves

Scope:

In 1940, a dog named Robot disappeared into a rocky cleft in south-central France, leading four young boys to the discovery of a lifetime: a previously unknown cave that was filled with extraordinary paintings of animals and various symbols created by Ice Age hunters. Among the images in the heart of the cave was a human figure wearing a bird-like mask, standing near a wounded bison. Archaeological study of the paintings and the cave deposits showed that the art was 15,000 years old. This cave, called Lascaux, is only the most elaborate of a constellation of painted caves in France and northern Spain. These rank among the world's oldest religious shrines, although prehistorians continue to debate the meaning of the art and the nature of the ceremonies held by torchlight in these deep caverns. Hunting magic and the spiritual initiation of young hunters may have been the purpose behind the art.

Outline

- I.** The origins of the human religious impulse, which consists of desiring to bury our dead and to pay them honor and reverence even after they have passed away, will be one of the strands that binds this course together.
 - A.** In this lecture, we're going to look at two more strands and their origins in the Paleolithic: the idea of sacred space and the emergence of a god or deity.
 - B.** Both of those quests for origins take us back to northern Spain and southwestern France.
 - C.** We have moved forward thousands of years, and the Neanderthals have vanished. We are with our own modern human ancestors and the world they left behind in what we call the Upper Paleolithic.

- II.** In 1878, a Spanish nobleman named Sautuola went to see a Paris exposition that featured cave art.
 - A.** He was very excited by the exhibits and decided to explore a cave on his own estate in a hill called Altamira. The cave had been discovered by a huntsman seeking his lost dog.

- B. During the exploration, Sautuola's daughter, Maria, found that the cave's ceiling was covered with paintings of extinct bison.
 - C. We know now that those remarkable paintings are about 15,000–16,000 years old.
 - D. French prehistorians dismissed the discovery at first, and it was years before they came around.
- III.** In France in 1940, four boys were out rabbit hunting near a place called Lascaux. In a strange repeat of what had happened at Altamira, one boy's dog disappeared.
- A. When they followed the sound of the dog's barking, they found something even more spectacular than Altamira.
 - B. The first impression that the Lascaux paintings made was that this place was all about hunting magic, or sympathetic magic.
 - C. It seemed possible that these caves were chambers of initiation for rites of passage involving young hunters.
 - D. André Leroi-Gourhan, on the other hand, suggests that the symbolism in these paintings is about an opposition, or perhaps a conjunction, between male and female.
- IV.** In the years between the discovery of Altamira and that great exhibition in Paris in 1878, a new class of small art had begun to appear.
- A. There was a group of figurines or statuettes called Venus figurines, revealing an element of femininity that was lacking from early discoveries.
 - B. In France, outside a cave at Laussel, a slab of stone was discovered on which there was a woman, a mother-goddess figure.
- V.** There is a lot of evidence about how cave art was created.
- A. We found little lamps, sometimes filled with animal fat, used to light the work while it was going on.
 - B. A study of the pigments shows the few colors that were basic to this art form and the ingredients from which they were made.
 - C. Not only were the lines sometimes incised, but the color was sometimes blown on through a little blow gun.

- D. We also know that these wonderful rituals could be accompanied by music.
- E. Some paintings seem to have been placed in areas of the caves specifically for their resonance.

Suggested Reading:

Bahn and Vertut, *Images of the Ice Age*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. Some scholars regard Paleolithic cave art as simply "art for art's sake." Does this seem reasonable to you?
- 2. Animals play a central role in cave art. What role do they play in the iconography of contemporary religions?

Lecture Three—Transcript

Hunting Magic in Sacred Caves

Welcome back. Last time, we talked about the origins of that human religious impulse, which consists of desiring to bury our dead and to pay them honors and reverence in a way that shows our concern for them even after they've passed away. That's going to be one of our strands in our entire course together. Now in this lecture, we're going to look at two more strands and their origins back in the Paleolithic, the Old Stone Age. We're going to be looking at the idea of sacred space: the idea that with art, with certain monuments, certain beliefs, you can mark off a bit of landscape or real estate as sacred in distinction to the rest of the land around it.

We're also going to look at what may be the beginnings of a god, a deity. Both of those quests for origins take us back to the same corner of the world. They take us back to the Atlantic seaboard of Europe in northern Spain and southwestern France, into a land where there were many Neanderthal remains. A dense population of Neanderthals, that's where Le Moustier and some of the other important sites are—La Chapelle-aux-Saints—that we talked about last time. Now we've moved forward thousands of years, Neanderthal have vanished, and we're with a different set of people, our own modern human ancestors and the world that they left behind, in what we call the Upper Paleolithic as opposed to the Neanderthal's Middle Paleolithic.

It was in 1878 that in Paris—which at that time rightly considered itself one of the intellectual centers of the universe—an exposition was held at which all sorts of displays were presented to the public of antiquities, both fossil animals and human remains. A Spanish nobleman named Sautuola went up to Paris because his hobby, his passion was, as with so many 19th-century Europeans, studying the remote past, collecting relics and treasures from ancient times. He went to Paris. He saw the exhibits, and he was very excited by the fact that some of the portable pieces of art—what we might call mobiliary art, things you can take around that are mobile—had come from caves. These were carvings in bone or Mammoth ivory, Mammoth being one of the Ice Age forms of the elephant, the great monstrous shaggy beast that was no longer found wandering around France and whose presence showed that back in the Ice Age, the climate of France was very different, much more like Siberia.

He saw these things, these things of animal carvings and other emblems, there were little things such as plants and so on on these carvings, and he was inspired. Because he knew that back on his estate in Spain, on a hill called Altamira—and that means “the high look out”—a huntsman had stumbled on a cave that had been lost to sight for centuries when his dog got lost behind a pile of rocks on the side of the hill. The huntsman, in digging away rocks to free the dog, stumbled into the entrance of this cave. So in 1878, Sautuola went back and began to do systematic investigations in this cave, down on his hands and knees under the low roof of the cave, digging through the dirt looking for objects that would compare with those beautiful works of primitive art that he'd seen in Paris. Remember, at this time the scientific world did not have a good way of dating any of this. That it was very old, everyone could agree; how old, no one really knew. The scientific dating techniques like radiocarbon dating were still far in the future.

Sautuola had been going up to cave at Altamira for a number of expeditions when his daughter, 10-year-old Maria, one day asked to go along. As she remembered it many years later, he tried to talk her out of it. He thought she would be bored and irritable. She insisted, and he took her up on his horse and together the two went up to Altamira. As he entered the cave, he immediately did his usual routine: He got down on his hands and knees and started scraping away at the dirt looking for things. Maria remembers that she rambled around looking everywhere and as any child would, instead of looking down, she looked up. She remembers shouting, “*Mira, mira, Papa, bueyes.*” “Look, look, Father, oxen, bulls.” He looked up, for the first time in all those sessions he'd spent in the cave at Altamira, and saw that the ceiling of the chamber in which he had been working was covered with paintings of not just bulls, not just oxen, but extinct bison: great shaggy beasts running, leaping, charging, curled up as if in death, a whole herd of these animals.

In the flare of his torch, they seemed to be alive, and he realized later that was because whoever had painted these animals had actually molded them onto the surface with their pigments in such a way that natural bulges in the rock became the shoulders or hindquarters of the animals. The way they'd been placed made them three-dimensional, made them seem alive and moving as the torch moved around the cave. Of course, that isolated torch that he was carrying

helped duplicate the effect they would have made back in the Upper Paleolithic when they were painted.

We know now that those remarkable paintings were about 15,000–16,000 years old. He didn't really know. The one thing that he could tell that made it clear that those paintings were very ancient was that they had a sort of a calcite covering on them. You're familiar with stalactites in caves where the calcite drips down in a watery solution and will eventually form icicle-like stalactites hanging from the cave. It can also spread out in a sheet. The paintings were under such a sheet and it was clear that it had taken centuries, if not millennia, to form. So he knew he was looking at something very old, something—he hoped—as old the little tiny bone and ivory sculptures he'd seen at the great Paris exposition. So he wrote it all up, and he published it. The king of Spain, Alfonso XII, came up to look. It was a huge sensation in Spain.

Poor Sautuola died of grief when he discovered that the French prehistorians completely dismissed his discovery, accused him of being a fake and a charlatan, and of having hired a painter to create that fresco, a sort of Sistine Chapel ceiling of prehistory. It was years before the French prehistoric scholarly community came around to agreeing Sautuola was right. He had found evidence of art not on a small mobiliary scale, but on a gigantic scale that turned a whole underground chamber into a sort of chapel or church. In fact, when Maria was a grown woman, the head of the French Academy came down—the man who had written the harshest dismissals of her father's discovery—and personally apologized to her for the terrible mistake.

It was some years later that in France, a discovery was made that in some ways parallels the amazing discovery that Maria made on the ceiling of the cave at Altamira. The year was 1940 and four French boys were out rabbit hunting near the river Vézère, in the Dordogne region of France near a place called Lascaux. One of the boys had a dog who had accompanied them on the rabbit hunt, and the dog's name was Robot, or as we would say it in English, Robot. In a strange repeat of what had happened at Altamira, Robot suddenly disappeared, and they could hear him barking from a great distance.

Now one thing that these places we've been visiting in these two lectures—Shanidar cave in Iraq, Altamira in Spain, Lascaux in southwest France—they all have in common is they are what is called karst country. Karst country are regions or places where there are

limestones in beds, water gets down into the limestones of these ancient sea floors that have actually been lifted up, so they're now high and dry—my own Ohio Valley in the middle part of the United States is such a karst region. Those waters of underground rivers flowing through the limestone and dissolving it create caves. So they're very important for prehistory, very important for archaeologists.

These boys were not surprised that Robot had disappeared. They figured he had dropped down a sinkhole or a cave entrance, and they ran back to get a rope. When they followed the sound of his barking, tied the rope, and slid down it themselves into the unknown with their torch, they found what Maria Sautuola had found, but even more spectacular. If she'd found a chapel, they found a cathedral, a Notre Dame of Paleolithic art.

Altamira had featured those bison, almost to the exclusion of any other forms. Lascaux had horses, bulls, even strange monstrous animals like unicorns that were obviously the creation of someone's fantasy. There were rhinoceros, all kinds of beasts, running in great herds, standing. There was a painted horse almost in the Chinese style, and there were symbolic markings, dots, and arrows. The boys roamed up and down; these young discoverers looking through the gallery at this incredible array of animals all their own and went back told their friends. The next day, they charged money for their young friends to go down; the next day after that the young friends brought their parents; and on the third or fourth day, the estate agent showed up for the land owner whose property this was, and the boys were no longer able to collect entrance fees and keep them for themselves. They went into partnership with the land owner.

They had begun a lifelong mission. Those young boys grew up and stayed tied to that cave at Lascaux all their lives. I've met people who visited there in the latter part of the 20th century who had one or the other of the boys—now grown men—show them around and talk about that incredible day when Lascaux Cave was discovered in 1940.

What had they found? This was a huge argument because clearly there was some sort of function, some sort of meaning here. Taking a cue from Altamira, where it seemed to be a herd of game animals, the first impression that Lascaux made on the scientific mind was that this was a place all about hunting. It's all about hunting magic, or what's called sympathetic magic. If you bang a drum in a rain

dance, that's sympathetic magic. You're trying to get nature to roar and bang with thunder—which is what you want to hear to bring the rain—in sympathy, in fellow feeling. This is what sympathy means: feeling together, suffering together, is what it really means. As you bang the drum, you're trying to call the thunder. If, when we get to fertility rights, we've got young couples out on the fields copulating—sexual union—that's sympathetic magic, a religious rite trying to remind nature it needs to be fruitful and multiply also, if the human group is to survive. So the idea of sympathetic hunting magic was to cover cave walls with these images of game animals—and it's true, most of them were the kind of game animals that were hunted though not necessarily always the ones hunted right in that region—cover the caves with images of these animals, and then let the young hunters throw weapons at these animals. Some of the animals were shown with weapons by them. Some were wounded. Some even believed that in some of the places, you could see dents in the cave wall, the soft surface of the cave where a point had struck. This would have been not really target practice but some sort of magical performance by hunters.

Then the idea was carried a step further. Here's a sacred place, enclosed, a sacred chamber, someplace dark and mysterious. What would be the point of this, if not something mysterious, magical, awe inspiring? The 20th century was the time when the scientific world of the West, of the Americas and Europe, really began to tap into the tribal lore that had been ignored and exiled from polite society for so long. They learned about initiation rites. Rites of passage, rituals, turning points in people's lives where they pass from one stage to another and the supreme right of passage was passing from a child to an adult. Sensible societies marked this with a specific day in a human being's life when you woke up a child; you went through your initiation ritual; and you went to bed a grown man or woman with all the rights, honors, and prerogatives that attended that new position of respect. It made for very well-adjusted, happy people who felt intensely bonded to their tribe. The religious ritual of the rite of passage helped ensure that.

Typically, in modern times, tribal societies report that the young men and women have visions—maybe through fasting, maybe simply through isolations, through other means—they see visions of the spirit world, of a protector, someone who will be with them through their lives. They have a sense in that moment of being connected to

the divine, to the supernatural. That stays with them, and that seems to mark their passage into this new estate. The real things of the world have been revealed to them. We certainly, in our society, bring up children in a bubble of beliefs, myths, fantasies, and fairy tales, which at some point they are expected to put away—as in Saint Paul's words, "Put away childish things." When you become an adult, it's time to take the world seriously. That's what happens in a rite of passage.

Wasn't it possible that these caves were chambers of initiation for rites of passage involving young hunters? It was noticed that at many of the caves—and Lascaux and Altamira turned out to be just two big stars in a constellation of painted caves all over northern Spain and southern France—wasn't it possible that each one functioned as a chamber of initiation for its tribe, the people that created those paintings? Wasn't it possible that in those dark spaces lit by torches, the young men in their turn, in small groups would be taken in and instructed by the elders? And when they finally emerged, after seeing these strange visions—the animals seeming to move on the walls and the flickering light—they felt that they were in touch with the spirits of the animals? Perhaps they sought strength from them or perhaps they sought dominance over them. At any rate, they emerged changed, emerging now as full adults.

This is an attractive possibility, and I feel there must be some truth in it. The hallowed ground of those caves, in that case, becomes like the dark hall of initiation in classical Greece in the small town of Eleusis near Athens, where in a gigantic pillared hall—in darkness—people went in, men and women alike, and were initiated into mysteries of life and death. They took an oath of secrecy, and they all kept it so well we don't know what was shown in the great hall at Eleusis. That cave-like space may actually hark back to our caves in the Upper Paleolithic era with these beautiful frescoes on the walls. At Eleusis, there was even a faint, natural slot in the bedrock, a sort of fissure that was claimed to be an entrance to the underworld to complete the link. We might even draw a similar link to such places of initiation as Masonic lodges, where you go into this enclosed space and have an experience through which you rise in your knowledge and understanding and in your status as well because you have been initiated, you have made a new beginning.

One of the scholars who was not entirely satisfied with the hunting and male-oriented approach to these caves was the husband of our palynologist from our Shanidar lecture, Arlette Leroi-Gourhan: André Leroi-Gourhan. He took a very anthropological approach, also a very intellectual approach. He wanted to study all of the pictures and see exactly what was there and which ones were juxtaposed. He found that often male and female animals seemed to be deliberately set together or opposed within a given cave. Leroi-Gourhan got the idea that the symbolic meaning behind what you saw in those caves, that cave art, was about an opposition, an opposition between male and female, or perhaps a conjunction. At any rate, a recognition of creation divided into these two great branches—the male and the female—brought together in the caves. He proposed the idea that what they were really about was a magic, a religious world view or belief that had to do with the idea of the importance of male and female. This brings us back to the idea of fertility, abundance, the sexual union that produces the next generation, produces life.

A set of finds had been made in the intervening years between the discovery of Altamira and that great exhibition in Paris in 1878, where the small art was displayed. A new class of small art had begun to appear: the portable art of this Upper Paleolithic, of these Ice Age human hunters. This was a class of art that showed women. Now the males were never portrayed in this way, but there was a group of figurines or statuettes that have come to be called Venus figurines, named after that Roman goddess of erotic love and beauty and sexual abundance. These statuettes were found not generally in the caves, but at the campsites where the people lived. Here we come to a very important distinction between the situation we encountered at Shanidar in Iraq with the Neanderthals back around 45,000 years ago, and the situation in western Europe, France, and Spain, and the other areas where our Paleolithic human hunters are living between about 25,000 and 10,000 years ago. You may have heard the term Cro-Magnon, that's who we're talking about here. That term is not used so often now, but it refers to those early groups of humans who, in fact, are anatomically modern. These hunters, in their European setting and all the way across Siberia and into the Near East, like to create these small images of women.

They were often carved out of mammoth ivory, and they exaggerate certain parts of the female anatomy at the expense of other parts. The feet, for instance, often simply come to a point at the base of the

legs as if the little figurine was meant to be shoved into the ground so that it could preside over a place of offering or ceremony or prayer, a request from the person who was using it. The sexual characteristics of the figure are emphasized: broad hips, shapely and large buttocks, breasts, the female genitalia sometimes very carefully marked out. The faces are almost always an impersonal blank as if that's not the point. This is not a portrait. This is something beyond mere portraiture. The hair is often shown in great detail: braided, curled, arranged in very sophisticated ways, which suggests that if we actually had photographic records of those Paleolithic people, we would be dazzled by the complexities of their dress and their hairstyle.

These Venus figurines bring an element of the femininity into the picture that was lacking from early arguments and early discussions of what was going on in those caves and what was the main focus of Paleolithic religion based on the archaeological record. In France, outside a cave or rock shelter at Laussel, a slab of stone was discovered on which there was a woman, one of these—I think of them now as sort of mother figures, mother-goddess figures even. We're going to visit them again two lectures from now, at Çatalhöyük in the Neolithic. She is standing in a supremely confident and powerful stance, and she's holding aloft in her hand a ram's horn, an animal's horn, which appears to be both a symbol—perhaps of abundance as in our own cornucopia—that full horn of plenty which was the symbol of later goddesses of abundance—but also in her case, an emblem of power, that this is a being who transcends ordinary human powers.

Put these things together and there came the idea that the caves might be a general place of initiation, where the prints of hands of what appeared to be young people. Small people, could be boys and girls alike, were brought into these caves and in their turn, taught the initiation rituals and also the information they needed, the truths they needed to hear to pass from that cloistered world of childhood into the full understanding—spiritual, material, social—of an adult. For boys, this probably happened, judging by what are called ethnographic parallels. Ethnography is writing about a society's culture. Ethnographic parallels came to people from the 18th and 19th and 20th century from people that they encountered who were still living as hunters and gatherers or fishers or simple horticulturists, not yet harnessing animal power for their farming. All of these different

groups could shed some light on what lay behind this world of ancient art where the people couldn't speak for themselves.

So from the ethnographic parallels, we know boys were often initiated into manhood in groups such as the Inuit at a point where they were able to make their kills. In fact, there are records of Inuit above the Arctic Circle, the group sometimes called Eskimo, who were actually making their kills and being initiated into manhood at 12 or 13. Girls would often be initiated into womanhood with their first menstruation and that, of course, could come far sooner than we in our society are willing to acknowledge a young female as fully adult and able to make her own decisions and take her own place in the world.

So these two things—the onset of the menses or menstruation for the girls, the ability to hunt and trap game and bring it back and be providers, for the boys—seemed to have marked those crossing over places. What we can imagine is that the caves—the great painted caves like Lascaux, like Altamira, like so many others—were places visited again and again for thousands of years by these groups of Ice Age hunters, who were bringing their young people in for these revelations, for these ceremonies and rituals lit by the torches that would help young people make this great transition, go through this great rite of passage.

Now there's a lot of evidence for how the art was created. We found little lamps, filled sometimes with animal fat that was used to light the work while it was going on. A study of the pigments shows just a few colors that are basic to this cave art and the things that they were made out of. We've already encountered the ochre, that is that iron-rich pigment which gives you the blood red. There's another kind of ochre, yellow ochre, that gives you the yellow. Of course, the charcoal from the fires could give you the black. Black, red, yellow, that is also the palette of a Greek vase painter. If we add white, those are the four colors that Aristotle came to think were universal to the human condition in some sort of elemental way: red for blood, black for bile, yellow for phlegm, and white also for phlegm. If we want to come forward closer to our own time, these are the colors of Rembrandt's palette. The blues and greens are not present. They are rare in early art. We're only going to find them in a few places, featured in spots like Egypt and the Maya country. There's something elemental about these fantastic Stone Age paintings.

What amazes, even after one has studied the technology that brought them into being, is the ways the caves were lighted, the mixing of the pigments. We know that not only were the lines sometimes incised, but the color was sometimes blown on through a little blow gun. You'd stuff the powdered pigment down in the fluted shaft of the blow gun and blow it onto the cave roof. We also know that these wonderful rituals could be accompanied by music. So what you had decorated with this art was a space that would be sacred, different from outside. Nobody lived in those caves, unlike Shanidar; as I said, these caves were devoted to their religious purpose. At Shanidar, the ordinary living went on around and above the ancestors buried down in the floor of the cave. Lascaux and Altamira were dedicated places for religious ritual. We know that they had music in the Upper Paleolithic. Flutes have been found made of bone. They would have been played probably like recorders and also even a thing that's been reconstructed as a xylophone that would have been banged on, perhaps, with ribs to give music.

We know that some of the areas chosen in the caves seem to have been chosen specifically for their resonance, their echoing quality so that someone singing could stand at one end and fill the whole area of the cave with music. So in all this way, we can see how a sacred place was created and how rituals probably of initiation were reenacted in these spots. As we hark back to this whole story of how these caves were brought to light and discovered and who they are probably for, as we think of all those generations of young Paleolithic boys and girls passing out of their childhood state and ascending to become men and women on their own, it does seem very appropriate that the discoverers of all of this great Paleolithic art in its original phase, in that door-opening moment when the world truly became aware of the classic caves, Lascaux and Altamira, that the discoverers too were children on the beginnings of their lives.

Lecture Four

Myths of the Shaman

Scope:

Early European visitors to South Africa encountered paintings, some of them apparently of great antiquity, on rock faces in the Kalahari. Their discovery predated the first finds of painted Stone Age caves in Europe, and the art of the San peoples was consequently classed as decorative art or, more dismissively, "prehistoric wallpaper." Anthropologists and archaeologists in recent decades have been able to demonstrate that the rock art is in fact religious. Specific images and scenes can be linked to the religious mythology of the San, and in some cases to specific rituals. As in the much older painted caves of France and Spain, San rock art often seems concerned with hunting magic. Animals, such as the eland, are prominent in San myths and also in San art; some large beasts are also depicted surrounded by humans in rainmaking ceremonies.

Outline

- I. This entire world of ideas, of actions, of things left behind, introduces us to the idea of cognitive archaeology, which tries to go beyond a mere record of what was left and a reconstruction of what the technology was that created it, all the way into the cognitive processes that led religious specialists to create.
- II. We can see the first of these religious specialists in Lascaux Cave.
 - A. We call such a person a shaman, a term that came into scholarly thought and parlance from stories of Siberian tribes who had religious specialists.
 - B. In Lascaux, modern investigators found a scene involving a confrontation among several figures: a wounded bison being hunted, a human it seems to be charging, and a bird that mimics the shape of the man's head.
 - C. One of the elements of shamanism involved dealing with animal spirits and sometimes assuming the spirit of an animal to pass into the spirit world. Perhaps the third figure represents such a shaman.

- D. Confirmation that shamans dressed up as animals can be found in the French cave of Trois Frères, where two cave paintings show parts of animals worn by humans.

III. This introduces us to this world of the shaman.

- A. Shamans were found wherever there were groups of people living together as bands or tribes who felt some sort kinship.
- B. Tribal and band societies and our earliest ancestors typically did not specialize. The shaman was an exception.
- C. The previous shaman trained the new shaman.
- D. Often the most important religious things are shrouded by a veil of secrecy; so it was with shamanism.
- E. In the 19th century, two Native American shamans felt they had come to the end of their tradition and told their stories.

IV. Shamans are found all over the world. However, we will focus on shamans of the Kalahari Desert.

- A. Here groups lived by hunting and gathering well into the 20th century.
- B. In *The Hunters*, John Marshall followed four hunters, including one shaman, around the Kalahari Desert. The shaman's task was to be in touch with the spirits of the animals and to lead the hunters to those animals.
- V. Our record for the shamanistic tradition in South Africa is rock art.
 - A. Brian Fagan uses this rock art as an example of putting shamanism into visible form.
 - B. The people of that area interviewed in the 19th and 20th centuries explained that their shamans had different functions, including rainmaking and hunting, linking them with the earliest times.
 - C. What do we see in some of these panels of rock art?
 1. Like the Paleolithic caves in France and Spain, they often show us animals.
 2. They sometimes show scenes between humans and animals that seem imagined rather than real—scenes of religious ritual.

- D. Individual shamans are shown with peck marks and little dots all over their bodies. It has been suggested that these show us that boiling feeling inside when one is slipping into the trance.
- E. Shamans in the Kalahari Desert used whirling, music, chanting, intense concentration, or breath control to slip into that place from which they could access the spirit world.
- F. Another very familiar body of this rock art is in Australia.
 - 1. The landscape is marked by the petroglyphs of the Aborigines and shows their vision of things that happened in what was called the dream time.
 - 2. The dream time was that shadowy period before our current, everyday world, when spirits walked the land. Every rock, every watering hole, every plain has a story attached to it from the dream time.

Questions to Consider:

1. In most societies where shamans play an important religious role, people count on them for healing. What do you consider to be the spiritual aspects of the healing process?
2. The rock art of the Kalahari Desert, the Australian bush, and other regions confronts us with the question: Why does art seem to accompany the religious impulse in so many societies?

Lecture Four—Transcript

Myths of the Shaman

Welcome back. In the beginning, there were burials and beliefs about the after life. In the beginning, there were also sacred spaces, caves for example, set apart from ordinary daily life, for religious use. In the beginning, there were rituals that involved communities in religious life. In the beginning, there were figures that we believe represent divinities, gods, supernatural beings, like those mother or Venus figures that we saw from the Upper Paleolithic. All of this world of ideas, of actions, of things left behind, introduce us to the idea of cognitive archaeology: the archaeology that tries to get behind a mere record or tally or presentation of what was left behind and a reconstruction of what the technology was that created it, that tries to get all the way into the minds of those ancient people, the cognitive processes that led them to create a place like Lascaux, a burial like the one at Shanidar, an image like that little Venus who was from a place called Willendorf, or the woman carrying the horn who was from Laussel.

This cognitive archaeology brings us to the idea of thoughts and the idea of people conceiving religious ideas, conceiving what is on the other side of that veil between our material world and that supernatural divine spirit world. So in the beginning, there are also religious specialists. They are the forebears of the modern priests and priestesses of the world, those people who devote their lives to serving the community at large as religious specialists or, in some cases, very much in their own minds, serving the deity by being a person whose entire life is devoted to religious things. Where can we see the first of these religious specialists?

I believe we see in Lascaux cave, in a part that was not explored by the boys themselves in that first day because it was deep inside the cave and down a shaft—very difficult to access—a scene involving one of those religious specialists. The term that we’re going to be using is “shaman.” It is a Siberian term because it came into scholarly thought and parlance from stories of Siberian tribes who had religious specialists, men or women, who could go into trances and serve their people in sacred ways. I believe we’re seeing such a person, such an individual, here. One of the most famous images of a Siberian shaman. These medicine men or medicine women use medicine in the sense both of curing substances and spiritual power, big medicine.

One of these Siberian shamans was depicted in a wood-cut engraving that went around the world and became widely familiar, dancing, holding his drum, beating on it in the way we talked about the musicians of Lascaux and the Paleolithic, creating music for their ceremonies, drumming up magic. But he's not arrayed like a normal hunter, as the rest of his tribe would have been; he's in a special garment. He is wearing the skin of an animal, of a deer or reindeer. The horns, the antlers of the animal are still attached to the skull, which now form the headpiece of this shaman. So he's somehow inside the identity of the animal.

Now let's go back to that shaft in Lascaux. Deep down in that shaft, very hard to get to, the modern investigators found a scene that had not been looked at probably for about 15,000 years. It was a scene that seemed to be enacting a ritual, or presenting a vision, or perhaps showing a myth. We're not sure, but it's a confrontation that involves several figures. First of all, dominant in the middle of the scene is an enormous bison vividly depicted with head down as if about to charge, in a position as of being at bay. The idea that there's some hunting going on here is supported both by the fact that below the bison is broken spear, or perhaps a spear shaft passing across the bison's body, and a spear thrower. This was an invention of the Paleolithic hunters used all the way up until fairly modern times by people like Aztec warriors. In fact, we borrow the Aztec word for this spear thrower, an *Atlatl*: a spear thrower that when used in the throwing hand with one end and the hand in the other hooked against the butt of the spear, could propel that spear twice as far, twice as fast, twice as hard as the human arm alone. It was an essential part of the Paleolithic hunter's tool kit as they went after these very dangerous big game animals, like the wooly rhinoceros or the mammoth or mastodon. They're found in many parts of the world including prehistoric America and in Europe and Siberia. That's what may be down there, below our big bison.

The bison has already, it seems, been wounded. Its guts are spilling out of its belly in a way that assures the animal is about to die. What is it charging? It seems to be charging a human or humanoid figure, a man, a stick man, who is falling over backwards as this enormous bison menaces him. Is he the hunter? Is that his throwing stick? Is that his spear thrower and his spear? Have in fact hunter and hunted been united in death, the hunter having succeeded in striking the great beast, but the beast having succeeded in killing the hunter,

whose imminent death is shown by falling over backward? If you look at the human's head, it's not a human head. It is the head of a bird. To make this crystal clear, below the bison and the man is a little stick, a standing stick as if you had thrust a straight stick down in the ground like a pole. On top of that pole sits a bird. There are not many birds in Paleolithic art. The bird sitting on the pole, its head mimics the shape of the man's head.

One of the elements of shamanism involved dealing with animal spirits and sometimes assuming the spirit of an animal in order to pass into that great world of spirits. We have a phrase or word in English, "berserk." The "ber" of berserk is "bear," and the "serk" or "sark" is the skin of the bear. Berserkers were north European warriors, Vikings, and others who would put on a bear skin in order to gain the quality of that bear, the ferocity of the bear. This is a spiritual idea, a shamanistic idea, that by entering into the skin of the beast, you get the qualities of that beast and you, in a way, master in the spirit world, that beast.

Do we not have here, perhaps, a shaman who has been acting as a bird man, who has somehow taken on the qualities of the bird? Some confirmation of the idea that in this Paleolithic world, familiar to us from Lascaux and Altamira and the cave paintings, there were shamans who dressed up as animals can be found in the French cave of Trois Frères—"three brothers"—where there are two cave paintings that don't show animals, but instead show parts of animals worn by humans, by men who appear to be dancing. Of course, the shaman's stock trade involves dances, music, chants.

In one of these, the most famous and the most finished of these Trois Frères shaman pictures, the man is donned just like that Siberian shaman in the 19th century. The skin, the head, the antlers of a stag or a reindeer, and the big branching antlers can still be seen in a very threatening way above his head. He's turned to face you in a very unusual way. Most of the beasts are presented in profile and you see his eyes staring out from that deer's or reindeer's head. He's dancing, and he's got his hands held in front of him. You can see the fingers underneath the slitted hide of the animal that he's wearing. Down at his other extremities, you see the heels of his feet so you know it's definitely a man inside the animal skin and not a dancing reindeer. Finally, you see his very human, male genitalia flopping out from under him as he bends forward in a way that emphasizes

those links to fertility that Leroi-Gourhan talked about—the idea that as we will see, Shamans are the caretakers of the spiritual health and the physical health of the band or the tribe that they serve.

The other Trois Frères image (we had the one that was the reindeer that looked like our Siberian shaman) is a man wearing a bison head. You can see the curving horns. This kind of bison would have been larger than the American bison we know today, but the same general branch of the animal kingdom. It's very interesting that some of the Plains Indians in the 19th century—tribes like the Sioux—had their medicine men put on the heads of bison and dance in them in a way extraordinarily paralleled to the Trois Frères figure as part of shamanic rituals.

Now this introduces us to this world of the shaman. I want to mention to you that it was a world that did remain very much alive up until the 19th century. Shamans were found wherever there were groups of people living together as bands or tribes, small groups, groups most of whom could feel some sort of alliance through kinship. Groups in which, if you took any given couple—male/female—and dropped them down in a new environment, they could reproduce every part of their own culture. If you dropped me in a new environment and asked me to reproduce my culture, I'm not sure I could reproduce anything: not the shoes or the clothes I wear, not the food that I eat, not the artificial air that I breathe in an air conditioned room, or the artificial sun that I stand under in electric lights. I can't reproduce the car, the means of transport, the weaponry. I can't do it. I'm a tiny cog in a gigantic mechanism where there are other cogs like me who produce the things I need but can't produce myself.

This is called specialization. Typical of tribal and band societies, typical of our earliest ancestors is no specialization. Every couple can reproduce their culture because all men do basically the same things and all women do basically the same things. Yet there was one exception to this: the shaman—and we do not know the ancient word for this figure—that person who was trained from childhood in the art of being able to pass from this material world over the divide. Who trained the shaman? The previous shaman. In some tribes, the tradition was it was kept in families. In others the shaman would simply be looking around for likely young people who seemed to show an aptitude for sacred things and that boy or girl would be

chosen to be trained up. I mentioned the 19th century in America. There were a couple of very rare instances when the secrets of being trained as a shaman—and they were secrets—I mentioned the last time when we talked about Eleusis, that Greek hall of initiation, that the rituals that went on there were secret. Often religious things, the most important religious things, are shrouded by a veil of secrecy. So it was with shamanism.

We do not, in general, know how shamans were trained. But there were two cases in the 19th century where shamans of two different tribes, one the Gros Ventre up in Montana, and the other of the Comanche, who had been moved onto a reservation in Oklahoma, shamans who felt they had come to the end of their tradition and there was no young person to whom to hand this heritage of centuries—perhaps even millennia—of belief, of knowledge, of tradition. They felt that it would end with them. Those shamans told their stories. Let's quickly look at them.

Up in the 1840s in Montana, there was a young boy named Bull Lodge, whose father had been killed, whose mother was now reduced in rank because she was a single woman and for whatever reason, she chose not to remarry. He grew up with a fire in his belly from youngest age that he wanted to be a great man. He didn't like the indignities that he and his mother suffered because of his fatherless state. To him, being a great man meant being a shaman, being a medicine man, being the keeper of the feathered pipe. Tobacco was to these people, as to many of the tribes in America, a sacred substance. The smoking of the tobacco pipe helped promote harmony among people, helped promote a feeling that you are in a religious or sacred space. Even in concentrated form, as we'll see when we get to the Natchez, it was used in religious ceremonies as an intoxicant.

This sacred pipe of the Gros Ventre tribe, of which young Bull Lodge was a very humble part, this sacred pipe was kept by the shaman, the keeper of the feathered pipe. Bull Lodge didn't approach him. He had no contact with him. That teepee stood in the middle of the community; Bull Lodge's and his mother's was on the extreme edge. Bull Lodge waited once until the tribe moved to a new campground, then he ran back, leaving his mother to manage the movement of the teepee to the next place. He found the little spot, the circle where the shaman's teepee had so recently been. He got down on his hands and knees and he found the hollow in the earth

where the pouch, the deerskin covered pouch where the sacred pipe had been stored.

He began to make up his own religion. He decided, there must be still some spiritual power around that hole. I will make it come to me. He put his hands over the hole—this is the story he told to his daughter many years later. She did not follow the way, but she became the recipient of his story. He put his hands over that little hole—he was probably about 10 at this time—and started to cry, started to call, started to shout for the spirits to come to him. He did this all afternoon with no result. As the sun went down, he got up and ran along the trail and caught up with the rest of the tribe. He kept doing this, time after time. As the years passed, and he grew to be a teenager, he kept up this religion. When he decided the spirits weren't interested in him, instead of giving up, he showed a true religious vocation by deciding, they didn't think he was serious enough.

So he began to show them he was serious by doing things like fasting or giving up foods that he liked, creating taboos for himself—things he wouldn't do. He became perfect in his behavior. He became helpful to his mother, modest and quietly spoken when addressed by adults. Finally, the visions were granted to him. Finally, the spirits did come as he told his daughter many years later, and they transformed him into that medicine man, into that great man that he wanted to be. He was ultimately entrusted with the sacred pipe.

A similar story in its outcome was told by Sanapia, a woman of the Comanche tribe in Oklahoma. It was told to a young anthropologist named David Jones who interviewed her, about how she became a medicine woman, an eagle medicine woman: the bearer of that sacred feather that had fallen from an eagle's wing long before, again the tie of wild birds and beasts to this shamanistic activity. She'd been unwilling, but her family who had been the traditional eagle medicine women, finally brought her into it and when she was an adult, all that childhood training kicked in when her sister had a sick child, and she was able to summon up the powers. These were healing powers that she felt and that others felt radiating from her. Sanapia explained to young David Jones she had to be a botanist. She had to be a pharmacologist. She had to be a repository of tribal traditions and lore, a singer of songs, a creator of rituals. She had to learn bedside manner. She went to years of what we would call medical school to become a shaman.

In the end, she and Bull Lodge met in the same place. They met at a place that had one very important element that we need to remember in terms of this religious and spiritual life. They had great powers, but they could execute them only for others. If they had been given spiritual might, it was only to serve. They could not help themselves. If they became sick, and most of what they were asked to do was healing, they had to go to another shaman for help. They could not use that for their own benefit. Another thing that they would do sometimes was making rain. This is, as we will see, a very common thing among shamans. Bull Lodge was famous as a man who could call the clouds and make the weather and the rain in his later years. So we have from our own American tradition stories of these shamans.

Now shamans are found all over the world. As far as we can tell, there was never a time when you could travel in a time machine and find an ethnographic parallel somewhere for shamanism. However, the groups that we want to conclude with today and focus on are the shamans of the area in the southern end of Africa called the Kalahari Desert. Here are groups who lived by a hunting and gathering lifestyle, since it's too arid to farm, right into the 20th century. These were groups with names like the San and the !Kung, an exclamation mark in front to stand for the click the clicking sound, click-Kung, or !Kung. These belong to linguistic groups that use these clicks in a way that is not paralleled by anyone else on earth as part of their phonetics.

If you want to see the San and their world and the !Kung and their world of hunting and deserts and magic, the best place to see it is in an extraordinary ethnographic film made by a young genius—18 years old when he made it—a man named John Marshall. He went with a combined Harvard and Smithsonian expedition to South Africa at a time when many of the tribes were on the edge of either extermination or coming into the world of farming and cities and civilization and all of their ancient ways passing into oblivion. In this incredible film, *The Hunters*, Marshall followed four hunters around the Kalahari Desert for days after they had first wounded a giraffe and then tracked it through terrain that looks like nothing so much as a gravel parking lot. For days, the slow-working poison that was in the tip of the spear—poison that is derived from the grub of certain beetles that live in the bark of the marula tree—worked its way through the giraffe's system. Finally, she is so weak and stupefied, the hunters are able to finally

catch up with her and bring her down and feed their families and feed their band for many days with her meat.

It's the most primal and elemental film every recorded, but there's a moment where one of the hunters, who's been introduced in the beginning as a shaman, as a man who goes into trances and in those trances, is able to pass into the spirit world. He is introduced. He's shown at a healing ceremony. Then while they're out on the hunt, he's also shown playing his bow from his bow and arrow as if it were a little harp, playing on one string there. So he's a music maker, typical of our shamans who use music to create that ritual, religious spell. They turn to him. They haven't seen the giraffe for a couple of days and say where is she? He folds his arms, and he thinks for a moment, pondering, calling up whatever vibrations he can, and finally points in a direction. They follow that direction and over the horizon, there she is.

So here was another area where hunters were finding a use for shamans, an importance for shamans. The shamans were in touch with the spirits of the animal, and they carry us back to the shamans dressed in the robes of the animals that were the prey, the hunted. The shamans are able to lead the hunters to those animals. Now our great record for this shamanistic tradition down in South Africa, is a corpus, a body, of rock art. It's as if you took Lascaux and Altamira and all those other painted caves, put your hand inside, and pulled them out so they're now inside out. They're part of the landscape on cliff faces, in rock shelters, facing out from mountainsides over plains, from protected clusters of boulders over waterways. They are out in the world. They are sanctifying certain places, and they are presenting a record of the shamanistic rituals that went on.

One of the scholars in the 20th century who's studied these is Brian Fagan, very important archaeologist of our own time, who's devoted an entire book called *From Black Land to Fifth Sun* to try and trace archaeological evidence for the development of religion. And he uses these rock paintings, rock carvings—petroglyphs as they're sometimes called—of the South African desert as an example of putting shamanism, that conviction that there are certain individuals touched by a special aptitude for slipping in and out of the spirit world, by putting shamanism into visible form.

When interviewed, the tribes of the area who created the rock art—and it carries us all the way back about 10,000 years with rock art

very difficult to date, coming all the way into the present. So one of the world's longest continuous traditions of art—of course, the Paleolithic art of Spain and France ceased to be made millennia ago—in the Kalahari Desert, so remote, and in other parts of South Africa like the Drakensberg Mountains, the rock-painting and rock-carving tradition remains strong from thousands of years ago right down to the present.

The people of that area interviewed in the 19th and 20th century explained that their shamans had different functions. There may have even been specializations within the shamans; that's not entirely clear. But there were shamans for hunting magic. There were shamans for rainmaking magic, which was something so important in this terribly arid landscape. There were shamans for curing. The curing is a human universal. All shamans that we know of involve themselves in curing, the basic human need. You're fine until you get sick, and then you need help. But those other two things, rainmaking and, above all, the hunting, carry us back to that link with those earliest times. What do we see in some of these panels of rock art?

Like the Paleolithic caves in France and Spain, they often show us animals. However, they sometimes show us scenes between humans and animals that seem imagined rather than real, scenes of religious ritual. One of these panels was pointed out as a rainmaking ritual. There was a special animal, a wild animal that had been trapped, apparently by the hunters. This may be all imaginary; it may not have really happened. The animal has some sort of a rope tied to it or tied to its nose, and it is being led by the hunters across the dry land in this picture, which was understood by the local people but certainly would have been completely obscure and cryptic to me. It was being showed in the rainmaking ceremony, which was presided over by a shaman.

Individual shamans are shown with strange peck marks and little dots over their bodies. It's been suggested these show us that boiling feeling inside when one is slipping into the trance. Shamans in the Kalahari Desert didn't use hallucinogens to get into their trances, although many shamans did. They would use whirling around or music or chanting or intense concentration or breath control—meaning cutting off the flow of oxygen to the brain—to slip from this ordinary every day world into that place from which they could

access the world of the spirits. This is what we see again and again in this rock art of the Kalahari Desert: These figures we would identify as shamans, in which the people themselves, the bands and tribes identified as shamans, carry out these essential rituals for the sake of others. They are there to serve. They seem to have been using, right down into the 20th century, some of the same means that we saw 15,000–25,000 years ago in the caves of Ice Age Europe.

Another very familiar body of this rock art, besides that in the Kalahari Desert and elsewhere in South Africa, is in Australia, where the landscape is marked by the art, the petroglyphs, of the Aborigines and shows their vision of things that happened in what was called the dream time. It was that shadowy time before our current, everyday world in which spirits walked the land and every rock, every watering hole, every plain had a story attached to it from that dream time. So it was in South Africa. An entire landscape was imbued with the art, with the imagery, which had its own power, with a sense of the sacred. In our fifth big session together of six lectures near the end of the course, we're going to be talking about sacred landscapes, about religious feelings so big that they go beyond an individual place like a cave or a church and begin to take over vistas, places like Stonehenge, Easter Island, Angkor, the Giza plateau in Egypt, where a world becomes reconfigured along religious lines. This rock art exemplified by the rock art of South Africa, showing those shamans, those figures, those first specialists, as religious figures who are able to act as intermediaries all through their lives—not just at initiation time, but all through their lives between their people and the spirit world. They are presiding figures in the very first of these sacred landscapes.

Lecture Five

Realm of the Mother Goddess

Scope:

What happened after the Ice Age? Did the religion expressed in the painted caves disappear from the earth? Many archaeologists believed so, until James Mellaart excavated the extraordinary Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük in southern Turkey. More than 9,000 years ago, early farmers formed a pueblo-like community in which rooms were decorated like Paleolithic caves with scenes of wild animals, hunters, and a powerful female figure, seemingly a Mother Goddess, who appeared to be the direct descendant of the Venus figures known from Ice Age Europe and Siberia. The excavation of Çatalhöyük, now supervised by Ian Hodder, shows that as humans settled down in permanent communities and began to domesticate plants and animals, communal religion seems to have intensified in expression and the complexity of its rituals and beliefs. Central to Neolithic religion was an elaborate cult of the dead, whose bones were often preserved directly below the house floors.

Outline

- I. We now embark on a new period in the history of humanity that will bring us right up to our own modern world.
 - A. Our focus site for the Neolithic, the period beginning about 10,000 or 12,000 years ago, is called Çatalhöyük.
 - B. The Ice Age came to an end in about 10,000 B.C., ending the world of the Paleolithic hunters. Humans began an extraordinary new experiment: reforming the world to meet their own needs.
 - C. We call this period the Neolithic Revolution. It consisted of a cluster of changes.
 1. Plants and animals were domesticated.
 2. A new pottery industry began.
 3. People experimented with using fire to alter natural substances.
 4. Dwellings became more modular.
 5. There were also huge changes in religion.

- II.** In the 1950s, James Mellaart was doing a surface survey of the Konya Plain in Turkey.
- He saw a mound and was told it was Çatalhöyük. *Höyük* means “mound” or “tell” (a layer cake of cities made of mud brick).
 - He walked up the mound. At the bottom, he saw earth walls; above that, little flakes of obsidian, ash, and signs of burning. Near the top, there was some pottery.
 - The 32-acre tell was entirely Neolithic.

III. There are several significant Neolithic sites in the Near East.

- In a cave at Wadi, Dorothy Garrod discovered a settled culture that she called Natufian. They lived in the prepottery Neolithic, or PPN, from around 9000 to 6000 B.C.
- Kathleen Kenyon had found a PPN fortified town with small dwellings and a religious cult of the dead at the bottom of the tell at Jericho.
- The PPN world is now known to have extended north and west into Turkey, thanks to Mellaart's discovery.

IV. What did Mellaart find at Çatalhöyük?

- He found a pueblo-like community, with square and rectangular rooms but no streets in between them and exits in the ceiling.
- The roofs were suspended on logs that spanned the dwelling area of the room, and smaller sticks were laid across them, where more earth was spread out.
- A lot of living took place on top of the roof. The interiors were for wintertime sleeping.

V. Most of the rooms Mellaart found were places we can only think of as made for religious worship.

- Walls were plastered, and in many rooms pigments of charcoal, ochre, and other substances were used to paint extraordinary scenes on the walls.
- Wild bulls are painted there, an emblem of a fearsome force of nature that must be tamed.
- There is now a sense of opposition between human and nature that did not exist in the Paleolithic world of animism.

- Çatalhöyük introduces the horned altar as a focal point.
- Also, the Venus or Earth Mother figure reappears, sometimes as a goddess of grain.

VI. Ian Hodder succeeded Mellaart at the site in 1993. His multidisciplinary team started working at the north side of the mound to see if the shrines Mellaart had located were typical.

- They wanted to know if Çatalhöyük was a ceremonial site, but it was not.
- They did find bodies, laid in baskets and wrapped in cloth, under the floors and molded benches.
- These early farmers honored their ancestors by planting them under the floor and living with them.
- There are very few sites in the world where everyday existence was so completely permeated with religious belief and action as Çatalhöyük.

Suggested Reading:

Balter, *The Goddess and the Bull*.

Mellaart, *Çatal Hiyük*.

Questions to Consider:

- The archaeological conception of a “Mother Goddess” is almost entirely built on discoveries of images, rather than preserved religious texts. Does the evidence support the conclusion presented in this course, or would you consider a different interpretation of these early figurines to be more likely?
- How would you expect religious beliefs and observances to change when a hunting and gathering existence is replaced by sedentary life in towns?

Lecture Five—Transcript

Realm of the Mother Goddess

Welcome back. Today, we reach a turning point in our course. We will leave behind us, for good, the world of the Ice Age, the Paleolithic, the Old Stone Age, and its hunters. We will embark on a new period in the history of humanity that will bring us right up to our own modern world. I hope that you've come away from these lectures about Lascaux and Shanidar and other sites with a feeling that that was a world of complex lives, of tremendous achievements, and of many advances and innovations in the field of religion that are going to cast their shadow forward into our course from now on. Above all, I'd like you to come away with the feeling that those much maligned folks, the Neanderthals, were in fact a remarkable group.

I think it's important to note that when I was describing for you that classic Neanderthal form put together by Marcellin Boule, I did not tell you at the time he was wrong about the most important thing of all. The skeleton he had chosen to put together was that of a severely crippled adult male, crippled by arthritis. It was no wonder he couldn't stand up straight. We know better now on the physical side. After all of those great pioneers of archaeology studying the caves, the burial sites of the Paleolithic, we know better on the cultural side as well.

Our type site, our focus site, for the Neolithic—the New Stone Age—which comes along about 10,000 or 12,000 years ago just with the end of the Ice Age is called Çatalhöyük. Now we're going to start using A.D. and B.C. dates in this lecture because we're getting close enough to our own time that those two millennia between us and the beginning of A.D. or, as it's called in another system, C.E. dates, start to matter. If I tell you that something happened 50,000 years ago, the 2,000 years just don't make that much difference. So from now on in the course, we'll be using B.C. and A.D. If you consult most modern archaeological works you will find a different system now used where the dates formerly known as B.C. are called B.C.E.: Before Common Era. The dates formerly labeled in the English system A.D. are labeled C.E., Common Era. I'm going to go on using the B.C. and the A.D. You can think of them either with their Christian-oriented original meanings or as, I like to think of them, backward count for B.C. and advancing dates for A.D. That way, you can put them both plausibly the date after the date or after the century.

At any rate, from now on we are in that world. So I'm going to tell you right now: the Ice Age came to an end about 10,000 B.C. That ended the world of the Paleolithic hunters. That ended the world that we've been in up until now and launched us on an extraordinary new experiment as human beings, one that really no other species has ever attempted to re-form the world to meet our own needs: That is the Neolithic Revolution. A lot of archaeologists object to calling it a revolution because it didn't all happen at once, but it all happened within a couple of thousand years. That's the twinkling of an eye in geological terms and even in the whole span of human history. So it remains in my mind the greatest revolution of all. If you had to pick the one point in human history where things changed in an irrevocable way, there it is.

Now what does the Neolithic Revolution consist of? It consists of a cluster of changes in which people settle down. They become sedentary instead of Nomadic. Why have they settled down? Because they have started gathering and ultimately domesticating plants, and now they have crops with single harvests and they've got to stay put and guard that harvest, as well as stay put and tend the fields where they're growing their food. They're also going to be domesticating animals, beginning with sheep, goats, cattle. At the time of this Neolithic Revolution a new pottery industry begins. Pottery didn't play any role up until now in our Old Stone Age world. Pottery is heavy, easy to break, not the stuff you want to carry around if you're a Nomad. But once you have settled down, pottery is essential and has proved essential for most farming peoples all over the world. It's been independently invented almost everywhere that farming began because you can find clay everywhere, and you've got fire and that's all it takes along with some water to make pots. Pots are used for collecting food, storing food, cooking food, and serving food. And they are a marker for us of not just the Neolithic cultures, but of all the ones that we will see from now on.

Experiments begin in pyrotechnology, using fire to alter natural substances. At our site today, Çatalhöyük, we will find that the people are burning limestone, even before they burn clay to make pots, to make the clay into ceramic. They are burning limestone to make plaster, and they are covering the walls of their beautiful houses with this plaster coating on which they will paint beautiful frescoes. We will find a strange change in living. Up to now, most dwellings have been round. The famous Inuit igloo still keeps this

round shape. It's a very easy shape to create. The nuclear family of the hunting world fits nicely inside it. However, for the homes of our Neolithic forebears, something bigger, grander, and more modular was needed. They needed something that could be put together in bigger and bigger units, which the circle form is not well adapted to. It's in the Neolithic and its sites like Çatalhöyük, today's site, that we see the change to the world we're used to. This artificial world of rectangles and squares that can be fitted together ad infinitum to create grids in which our lives are now spent.

Something that as a form is not found in the natural world, part of this new human landscape that we are imposing on planet Earth are our square houses, square rooms, gridded cities. All of this comes with the Neolithic, so it's a big turning point. There are huge differences now in that religion that we are embarking with, with our site today, Çatalhöyük. We need to go back to the 1950s on a cold and wet November afternoon, when a very young archaeologist names James Mellaart, an English archaeologist who was working at the school in Ankara, was doing a survey of a plain south of Ankara called the Konya Plain. He saw a mound off on the horizon, asked its name and was told it was Çatalhöyük. The *höyük* is a word for mound or tell. A "tell" is a layer cake of cities. Back in those days and in those parts of the world, cities were made of mud brick. So when there was high humidity, rain, and there was nobody taking care of the roofs, the walls would slump. The city would, in fact, bury itself in the decay of its own architecture. Then somebody would come along sometime later and build a new city on top. Up they would rise. You've heard the names of some famous tells, like Babylon, Troy, we're going to be visiting Ur in another lecture. These are all mud brick cities, one on top of the other.

Çatalhöyük was such a city. It got its name, the "höyük" from the mound and the name of the place "çatal" from the fact that it was at a fork in the road. So it's the mound at the fork in the road. It finds us at the fork in the road of our discourse between our Paleolithic beginnings and this new world launched with the Neolithic. James Mellaart was doing a survey. Most people think of archaeologists like myself as spending their time digging. Of all the activities we do, we spend the least amount of time on digging. None of us wish it were that way. We all wish we could spend all our time out in the field. That's what we enjoy most. However, if you do a proper analysis of everything that you've found, and if you've carried out a

proper survey to be sure that you are excavating at the best sites in the area—the most promising sites—you will find that you spend far more time with the preparation for your dig, systematic survey of broad areas, plains, fields, entire regions. You walk along them in a dragnet fashion with a whole line of field workers, walking straight toward the horizon, counting and noting every piece of pottery or flint flake that they see on the surface—that's a surface survey.

James Mellaart was carrying out a surface survey in southern Turkey in an area that had never been looked at archaeologically, this Konya Plain. He saw this big mound. He went over to it on a cold November afternoon, and he walked up the mound from the bottom. There was a lot of erosion in this area. The mound had been stripped of trees through the ages and gullies had formed in the mounds. We could look into the heart of the mound as he walked up. At the bottom, he saw earth walls—what we call adobe. These walls are made of pounded earth or sometimes of sun-dried brick, but not of fired bricks—certainly not of stone. Adobe architecture is familiar to many of us from being used down in the American Southwest. We'll see there's some interesting parallels between what Mellaart is going to find inside this mound at Çatalhöyük and the Pueblo architecture of our own American Southwest.

So he saw the adobe material at the bottom. He saw little flakes of obsidian. He saw ash and signs of burning, even burnt sections of all as he went up. He went up and up and up and near the top, there was some pottery. He kept waiting for the signs of the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Roman Period to appear. They never did. By the time he got to the top of that 60-foot tall mound, he realized he was standing on something that no one had dreamed existed: a 32-acre tell that was entirely Neolithic, New Stone Age. There were layers upon layers inside centuries of occupation at that same site, but all of it within this Neolithic period. He was as elated as it's possible for a human being to be, and he planned to make that site, Çatalhöyük, the target of a big expedition.

Now the person who'd led the way into understanding the importance of the Neolithic in the Near East, was our friend from our lecture on Shanidar, Dorothy Garrod of Cambridge, that pioneer who steered the Soleckis, Ralph and Rose Solecki at Columbia University, to Shanidar Cave to look for Neanderthal remains there. She was also responsible for working in a cave at a wadi. Wadi is a seasonal stream or gully in

the Near East, down near the Dead Sea in the Judean Desert. The name of the wadi had the word “natuf” in it. She discovered a culture there she called “Natufian,” which was Neolithic. It had the polished stone blades. The people were sedentary. They were building houses, but they weren’t using pottery yet.

There’s a word that comes out of this Natufian material and other sites that is going to apply to Çatalhöyük. It’s incredibly cumbersome. I wish we had something simpler, something more attractive, but wherever you see the three capital letters in an archaeology book, PPN, you’re looking at a site that belongs to the pre-pottery Neolithic, or the level of a site that belongs to the pre-pottery Neolithic. This starts probably back around 9000 B.C., runs up to the 6000 B.C. There are spots like the bottom of the tell at Jericho, that famous biblical site where Kathleen Kenyon, a pioneering British archaeologist, had found a pre-pottery Neolithic fortified town with small dwellings, enclosed by a stone wall that actually had at least one bastion in the stones of the wall, and a huge tower, that may have been for defense. She also thought she was looking at a granary there at Jericho. Also, she’d found a religious cult of the dead. The skulls of the ancestors were plastered over with their own features and kept under the floors of the houses, a fascinating site. No pottery yet. This whole world of the pre-pottery Neolithic is now going to be extended north and west into Turkey by James Mellaart’s discovery of the mound at Çatalhöyük, of this predominantly pre-pottery Neolithic site. I’m going to stop saying that term because it’s just such a mouthful, but that’s what we’re in with Çatalhöyük.

So the people are carrying their harvest and their crops and their ground wheat and barley and so on, not in pots at Çatalhöyük, but in baskets, in things made of leather. There were even cloth bags. All these are produced at Çatalhöyük. He put together a big team. They went out to the site and in the early 1960s, they worked there for several seasons. He decided to work on the southwest corner of this huge mound. Even today, only a fraction of it has been completely excavated.

James Mellaart is an archaeologist that I think of as a finder. In the world of nautical archaeology, where I spend a lot of my own time, Bob Ballard—the discoverer of the Titanic and of many other important shipwrecks—he’s got that same gift. You let him loose on an area and somehow, through a genius for it, an instinct—

something—that archaeologist will be guided to the best possible place to lay a trench. They pick the best possible mound to choose out of an entire plain full of mounds. They seem to just have this knack. Carl Blegen of the University of Cincinnati, who discovered the Palace of King Nestor at Pylos, he found the archive room with all the Linear B tablets the first morning of the dig. He somehow knew just where lay his first trench. I think of also the Ingstsads of Norway, who we’ll talk about a little more in our lecture on Viking religion, who when they were looking for a Viking settlement in America, found it with the first trench that they laid out at L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland.

So James Mellaart, he’s a finder. What did he find at Çatalhöyük? His trenches came down onto a fantastic pueblo-like community, all square and rectangular rooms but no streets in between them. They were joined together by party walls, like the little hexagonal cells in a piece of honeycomb. The whole thing was like an enormous hive, everyone living communally, together, almost one on top of the other. None of the rooms had doors. That was because they were exited through the ceiling. There would have been a ladder that came up through the fall to a hole in the ceiling, and they would have gotten out on the roof. The roof itself was suspended on logs that ran across and spanned the dwelling area of the room, the little square or rectangle, and then there would be smaller sticks or pieces of wood laid across them. Finally, on top of this platform, more earth was spread out. We know from finds of equipment that was being worked on or baskets and things, that a lot of the living took place on top in the roof, in the sunshine and the open air. They’d come down into the interior of the house during the cold winters, at night to sleep. One of the fascinating things found later at Çatalhöyük was that the lungs of Çatalhöyük people, based on the study of this area around their rib cages, had a tremendous amount of soot inside their bodies that they’d taken in through those long nights sleeping close around those smudgy fires inside these little rooms.

Well, if James Mellaart had simply been finding a huge community of these Neolithic people who herded sheep and goats but who still hunted quite a bit. There were still lots of wild animal remains there too. They were bringing in with their sickles, the flints now that were used for hunting and butchering game in the Paleolithic, they’re now being mounted in curved handles and used to harvest the crops out in the fields, initially wild grasses that were there for the taking,

ultimately planted fields. All this was going on, in a site that would have been important no matter what.

What he was not prepared for, what nobody was prepared for, was the fact that most of the rooms he came down into, coming down through their ceilings, were shrines, places of what we can only think of as religious worship. This is something we haven't quite encountered before even if we think of our Venus figures from Laussel, Willendorf, and the other sites, those portable figurines of those wonderful voluptuous women that could be carried around and planted in the ground and make a little portable sacred place there. Veneration, yes, but we don't think of worship exactly. In terms of that these rooms were like nothing anyone had ever seen in the world for a period that far back in human history.

First of all, that plaster that I told you about had typically been spread over the walls. Then in many of the rooms, pigments had been worked up from charcoal, from ochre, from other substances and used to paint extraordinary scenes on the walls. There were giant vultures with outspread wings soaring around and little decapitated human bodies in front of them, as if they'd bitten off the heads of those men. There were scenes that showed a giant bull, like something out of Lascaux or Altamira cave, a giant wild bull standing there on the wall. Then all around it, there were very diminutive human figures raising their hands, waving, dancing around it or seeming to taunt it. This is going to be a tradition of dancing with a bull, of dancing with this fearsome emblem of the force of nature that we're going to explore in great depth in a future lecture on rituals when we go to Nassau on the island of Crete and see the Minoan bowl dancing there.

This tradition seems to have its origins back here in Turkey and Anatolia at sites like Çatalhöyük. When little Maria Sautuola looked up the ceiling of her cave and Altamira and said, "Papa, bueyes." She thought they were oxen like the ones that pulled her father's plows on his estate. Oxen are, of course, animals that belong to the Neolithic after cattle had been domesticated. Oxen are male cattle, young bulls that have been castrated at an early age and grow up docile, big, sleek, willing to do the work without complaining. That's not what was on the Altamira Cave roof. That is not what's on the wall at Çatalhöyük. These are the wild bulls, *Bos primigenius*—the aurochs—this gigantic beast that at this point had not yet been

domesticated and is still an emblem to these people of this fearsome force of nature that must be tamed, mastered, defied, if humans are now to carve a living out of their world in a way that nature itself didn't really intend. There is no an opposition between human and nature that didn't exist back in that older Paleolithic world.

How can we sum up that sense of an opposition? I mentioned that we now have a feeling of worship in these shrines of the Çatalhöyük site, where people are focusing on a goddess, because we've got our goddesses here again: our great, heavily breasted, large-buttocked, wide-hipped mother figures, seated on their thrones, mistresses of beasts flanked by leopards or other great felines. We have them here to be worshipped, but we also have images of the natural world like the vultures and the bulls that seem to be opposed to the humans. Think back to the Paleolithic. It was different then, and it's different in any of the hunting cultures that survived down to the 20th century. Whether they're Inuit in the Arctic, Aborigines in the Australian desert, pygmy hunters in the Congo rainforest, wherever they are, they had the same kind of religious belief that we think started with those Ice Age hunters and was typical throughout the Paleolithic. This was a religious outlook called animism.

In the view of animism, there aren't individual great gods up there somewhere, like a big dynasty or family who you'd choose one or two and worship. Instead, it's all about earth and things that grow out of the earth and the surface of the earth. Every one of those things, whether it's a lake, an animal, a tree, a rock, a mountain, it has a spirit. What's the Latin word for spirit? *Anima*. It's the Latin word for "breath." Breath, soul, spirit: That's animism. Everything has a spirit. What the shamans are doing when they get to the next world is trying to negotiate or wrestle with spirits that are causing harm to people and seek out the favors of spirits that can help people. But none of them are exactly being worshipped. They are, instead, part of a great scene of which humans also, since we each have our own spirit, are caught up in. It's a much more level playing field.

Çatalhöyük introduces us to the idea. It stems from the thought that somewhere, there in the beyond, somewhere behind that wall, on which you see a figure with arms outstretched and legs outstretched as if doing the splits with leopards, which are in some cases, not simply painted on the wall but molded in the wall in three dimensions. It carries us back to those Lascaux paintings and the Altamira paintings,

especially where the bison on the ceiling were painted onto the bulbous projections of the natural rock. Here the three-dimensionality comes from the artists themselves. They create these fantastic rooms filled with these figures on the walls. But that's not enough. They bring them out into the room. We have horns of these wild bulls arranged around what can only be described as altars. That's going to be something typical right down into the biblical tradition, the idea of horned altars. We get the idea of a focal point.

We haven't really had that in our Paleolithic art, the idea that everything is arranged geometrically around a point, and this is coming to us, I think, partly from our new rectangular dwelling places, the artificiality of this geometrical world. The focal point will be a god-like figure or a bull's head elaborately painted with the horns still in place, projecting out of the wall and into the room as if that bull deity—which surely we must be seeing here—is about to erupt through the wall and into the presence of the worshippers. Now there was more to it at the site than this area of worship and shrines.

But there is one point I want to make here that has been of great interest to people since the beginning: Those Venus figures reappear at Çatalhöyük. That figure, that Earth Mother from the Ice Age, shows up here again. We find her on the wall art. We find her carved on stone plaques in little scenes. In one scene, she's shown twice, back to back, as in a cartoon strip. There seems to be a male figure she's mating with on one side. Then, if you look over the other side of this sort of high relief, three-dimensional panel, there's a child she's holding on her knee. So she's become a very great force, harnessed now, brought indoors, domesticated, but she's still there.

There was found by Mellaart in one of the grain bins, one of these little miniature silos within the community where that most precious thing that this community had, its crop, important not only for its food, but as the seed grain for the next year's planting. Inside one of those bins, he found one of these little molded figures that showed our Earth Mother seated on a throne with her hands resting on the sides of this chair. Then these beasts, these two great felines, which judging from the wall art are probably leopards flanking her to show her in this guise of mistress of beasts. So we are in a world with these early farmers, where if you were there and were trying to guess who is supreme to them, that little Venus of the Ice Age hunters that was carried around has now taken on a new role. Because it is out of

the earth, out of the Mother Earth herself, that the grain comes that now really supports the people. She is the ancestor of the familiar classical goddess Demeter—or as the Romans called her, Ceres—goddess of the grain, showing up here already with her devotees and worshippers and shrines, planted in a grain bin to show us exactly what her domain present is, imbuing this site of Çatalhöyük with a sense of the sacredness of the earth itself to these early farmers.

Now, elsewhere in the mound, Mellaart and his successor at the site, a very highly respected archaeologist named Ian Hodder, now at Stanford, who's teamed up with an archaeologist from Berkeley also and he is himself an English archaeologist. However, since 1993, he has succeeded James Mellaart at the site. James Mellaart just worked there in the '60s. A generation later, Ian Hodder came with his multidisciplinary team, and they started working at the north side of the mound. They were curious to see if all these shrines that Mellaart had located were typical. They wanted to know is this almost a ceremonial site? When we get to Chaco Canyon in our lecture in the future about Pueblo Bonito, there's a ceremonial site. Was Çatalhöyük like that? No. Ian Hodder, in excavating on the north with the new teams, found ordinary rooms used for cooking and working and living; but even there, the religious motif penetrates with an idea familiar to us all the way from way back at Shanidar Cave: the idea of living with the ancestors.

Under the floors, under the molded benches of earth that formed the furniture in these rooms were bodies. These bodies had been in some cases put out and exorcised, stripped of their flesh, perhaps by vultures themselves, but then carefully laid in baskets wrapped in cloth. Sometimes they were the bodies of children; infant mortality was high. They were then placed under the floors. Sometimes there were so many in one room, they disturbed one as they dug down to put another into the earth. These early farmers are planting their ancestors, putting them under the floor, living with them, honoring them. They are continuing to make them part of the family, part of the web of religious thought, of fervor, beliefs, and superstitions that make them feel that they are protected from all sorts of ill in this world where the stakes—thanks to their shift from hunting to farming—have been raised to a very high level. We will find very few sites in the world—what with the shrines and the burials under the floor—where everyday existence was so completely permeated with religious belief and action as Çatalhöyük.

Lecture Six

Mysteries of the Megaliths

Scope:

Megaliths, or “big stones,” were the world’s first religious stone monuments. The earliest megaliths were raised almost 7,000 years ago on the Atlantic coast of Europe, in Portugal, and most spectacularly in Brittany, France. Natural or rough-hewn slabs, some weighing many tons, were dragged to a site and were tilted or hoisted into place to form standing stones, chambers with capstones, and immense covered galleries and passages. Archaeologists agree that their prime purpose was commemoration of the dead; many megalithic structures still preserve skeletons and grave offerings. But ethnographic parallels from recent cultures in Madagascar, Indonesia, and New Guinea show that megaliths could also be raised to commemorate famous warriors, great feasts held to honor ancestors, peace accords between hostile tribes, or even the adoption of a child. They testify to a widespread religion of agriculturalists that supplanted the shamanistic rites of older, hunting cultures.

Outline

- I. Farmers are dynamic in a way that hunters and gatherers are not.
 - A. Farming helps population grow, and we are going to witness the world’s first population explosion.
 - B. We will also see two important religious innovations: the raising of enormous stone monuments and a fascination with the movements of the heavens.
 - C. The people who did that for the first time are the descendants of those who lived at Çatalhöyük.
 - D. In the Neolithic, population grew at a rate heretofore never imaginable, and these people had nowhere to go but out from the center.
- II. We follow the people who moved west from the Near East.
 - A. They got through the watery barrier between that Anatolian plateau and the land in the Zagros Mountains into Europe.

- B. They initially brought with them the tradition of building with mud brick, but as they went further into Europe, they began to build with wood.
- C. Ever westward they went, pushed by population pressure.
- D. The process took a long time, and the great movement ceased when they reached the Atlantic seaboard in about 4500 B.C.
- E. Their religious impulses were channeled in a new direction, called the megalithic movement.

III. The megalithic movement introduces some new elements to our history of human religion.

- A. In the earliest days of radiocarbon dating, it was thought that Atlantic European megaliths were an example of diffusion, an idea radiating from a civilized center, and were relatively young.
- B. We found, however, that in almost every case, these were the first examples of big stone architecture in history.
- C. It was then realized that megaliths had been independently invented in other parts of the world as well.
- D. Through ethnographic parallels, we can get some insight into the makers’ possible motives.

IV. Let’s begin our discussion by distinguishing the different kinds of megalithic monuments.

- A. The simplest is a gigantic, elongated block of stone, called a menhir in Brittany.
- B. If you put menhirs in rows, you have yet another kind of megalithic monument, as at Carnac in Brittany.
- C. A dolmen, which means “table,” would be the base of a structure such as a passage grave or a gallery grave.
- D. Finally, a circle of menhirs, called a cromlech, had a funerary purpose.

V. Based on ethnographic parallels with places like Borneo, Madagascar, and New Guinea, the European menhirs were most likely raised in honor of specific people.

- A. Dragging the stones a long distance seems to be part of the power or the magic.

- B. The standing stones are not always strictly funerary, but the other structures were meant as mausoleums.
- C. Everyday things that the interred had used in life were laid in the tombs with them, and this tells us something very important.
 - 1. In Çatalhöyük, the dead were living in the house under the floor with the living.
 - 2. With the megaliths, families lived apart from that sacred center, but life may still rotate around it. These people had a sense of land ownership.

VI. These sites hint at two other elements of Neolithic religion.

- A. In the south side of Brittany, at Gavr'inis, there is a very large tomb with a huge, dolmen-like chamber and a passage to the outside, decorated with spirals and strange symbolic shapes.
- B. At Newgrange, Ireland, we have almost the same building.
- C. The new element is that these spots were probably not just places to put the ancestors to rest but places of ritual.
- D. We can also see the beginnings at Newgrange and at Gavr'inis of a way of harnessing the sun.
- E. We see here the beginnings of gigantic architecture, sacred landscapes, and what we call cultural or archaeoastronomy.

Suggested Reading:

Burl, *Megalithic Brittany*.

O'Kelly, *Newgrange*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Through most of history, the largest monuments have been religious. Taking a global perspective, do you think the same priority exists today?
2. Megalithic monuments represent an extraordinary investment in planning and effort. What benefits might accrue to a society that adopted the practice of constructing such monuments on a large scale?

Lecture Six—Transcript

Mysteries of the Megaliths

Welcome back. We left our early farmers there in Çatalhöyük in that region near what used to be called, in my childhood, the Fertile Crescent, back in the days when it was thought that it all started in Mesopotamia, the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, and swept up in a sort of arc coming down into the Jordan River Valley and the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea—that Fertile Crescent. We're now up on the northern edge of it, in many cases, with the agricultural revolution happening in the Zagros Mountains, and over into Turkey, Anatolia, and sites like Çatalhöyük.

What happened? Where did those farmers go? Well they are bound to go somewhere because farmers are dynamic in way that hunters and gatherers are not. Farmers grow in terms of population. We are going to witness now the world's first population explosion. We're going to be seeing a religious innovation, in fact two important religious innovations, at some sites a long way from Çatalhöyük and those points of origin of incipient agriculture that are going to be important new streams in our great river of religious evolution. One of them is raising enormous stone monuments, creating huge feats of engineering to honor ancestors or gods. The second is a fascination with the heavens, an obsession with tracking the sun, the moon, the stars, and aligning religious sites in order to take into account their movements.

The people who are going to do that for the first time are the descendants many generations later of those folks who are living in what is today that mound at Çatalhöyük. As each generation passed, these farming families grew. As they grew, they had to spread out from the center and colonize new areas, find new fields for their crops and new grazing land for their herds. Farmers need big families in a way that hunters and gatherers didn't. In fact, hunters and gatherers can't afford big families. Nature is not going to increase exponentially the amount of natural food available in terms of game animals, fish, birds, nuts, roots, berries. That's a pretty static figure in the landscape. Once you have reached the cap on what your given environment will support in terms of people, you need to stop. You need to stop having children and keep the level right there. We called it in my youth zero population growth. That's what hunters practiced.

Agriculturalists are completely different in this way as in so many ways. Agriculturalists need many hands, but they only need them at certain times in the year. You've got gigantic needs for hands at times for clearing the land, turning the soil, or using your digging stick or dibble stick to poke holes in the soil, planting the seed. Then there's a lull until harvest time. Then you really need many hands. You suddenly need lots and lots of people out there gathering it in. You never know when the weather will break, when pests, birds, or locusts will come and strip your fields, or enemies. Suddenly, you've got a resource that other people can knock over. Warfare starts in this new world of agriculture and settled towns. So there are moments in the year you must have a lot of people. Even in our own day, farming families are likely to have many children to do the chores.

Well it was true then in the Neolithic. Generation after generation after generation of big families, we have a Malthusian explosion. People are being produced in this world in numbers heretofore never imagined, and they've got nowhere to go but out from the center. So we get one of the world's great pioneering movements. We get the movement out of that center in the Near East, where this wheat and barley and sheep and goat agriculture begins with those animal and plant domesticates. There are other centers around the world where it developed independently. They're going to move out from there to wherever they can find more land that's suitable for their farms, for their crops, for their children, their families. As they go, they take their way of life with them, their pottery, their own crops, and their own breeding stock of animals, and they move.

What I want to follow is the group that moved west. There was a barrier in this time between that Anatolian plateau, that area in Turkey around Çatalhöyük and the land further east in the Zagros Mountains. This was a watery barrier for those people moving west. It was formed by the Hellespont and Bosphorus, that channel of water that connects to the Mediterranean to the Black Sea and the Black Sea itself.

One of the really provocative ideas of the past few years—brought forward by a friend of mine, Bill Ryan, a great geologist and marine geologist at Columbia University—is that right about this time when those first farmers were settling in and around the Black Sea, the sea broke through at the Hellespont and the Bosphorus. The Bosphorus is the body of water by Istanbul, where those waters link up with the

Black Sea. What had been a vast basin with a small lake in the middle—what we today call the Black Sea—suddenly filled up.

Bill Ryan is intrigued by the idea that if early hunters had already populated that basin, that the influx of that mass of water from the Mediterranean might have created a situation where, in a catastrophic way, the water level rose to its current level. The Black Sea as we know it was formed and perhaps many communities drowned, certainly many would have been displaced. It's still an area of hypothesis. Bill went further—Bill Ryan—and suggested that this might have become folk memory and ultimately led to the creation of myths, legends, stories, historical accounts of what came to be known as the great flood. That showed up then in the book of Genesis as something that happened around Mount Ararat, which is indeed a mountain up near the Black Sea.

However they got across—and we should remember that that name “Bosphorus” means the place you carry cows across—they got over that watery moat and they got into Europe. They initially brought with them the tradition of building in mud brick and creating these villages with their party walls, that when the bricks slumped they would move up and create tells. There are actually tells in the Balkans and in Greece. But as they went further into Europe, the descendants of these farming families—each generation of two, jumping over the horizon into a new valley, into a new plain—they began to build in wood typically. There were vast forests of virgin timber. They would cut them down, build long houses, and have their livestock at one end and their own families at the other. They became a culture called the Danubian because it takes form around the great valley of the Danube River. Yet ever westward they go, pushed by population pressure. They were exploding to a point where as each generation comes along and farms, they are producing more children than that land can support and off they go over the horizon, very much in the same way that our United States was colonized by the descendants of Europeans back in the 18th and 19th century.

The process, however, took a long time. They don't get to the Atlantic seaboard until about 4500 B.C. So, it probably took 1,500 years worth of movement to get them all the way from the eastern Mediterranean to the Atlantic. By about 4500 B.C., Brittany and France becomes a little last bastion, a jumping off place. That

peninsula that sticks from northwest France into the Atlantic, that rocky peninsula of Brittany, becomes a furthest point. Also, Portugal down in Iberia up against the western seaboard of Europe becomes the westernmost point of Europe. In fact, there are places like Holland and so on. Beyond is water. Well, there's one more great push. They build boats and they get across to Britain and to Ireland, but then they can't go any further.

The great movement ceases. Some of the energies that went into that vast pioneering effort that brought along with it its ideas of Neolithic gods and religious traditions and veneration for the ancestors, that energy seems to have been channeled in a new direction along that Atlantic literal, along that Atlantic coastline of Europe, from Portugal in the south all the way up into southern Scandinavia in the north and including Britain and Ireland. We call that redirection of energy the megalithic movement. It's still a mystery to us as archaeologists why it was that those farming families, having reached the end of the world, began a tradition there that had no parallel in what they left behind. This was the tradition of getting enormous slabs of stone, in many cases weighing tons, and dragging them from their natural places. In some cases, they were roughly shaped out and erected as single standing stones or stone houses were built out of them, chambers. Not for themselves, not to live in, not to use for defense, but for religious purposes. This is the megalithic, the big stone movement, and that's what we're going to talk about in this lecture.

Because it is a religious movement in several directions, that will introduce to our history of human religion some brand new elements. Now it used to be thought back in the earliest days of radiocarbon dating—shortly after the technique was developed in the late 1940s—it used to be thought that these western European megaliths. And if you're thinking Stonehenge, it's a child, an offshoot of the megalithic movement, but it's got some unique elements that don't make it typically megalithic. But if you've ever seen a passage grave, a gallery grave, a dolmen, a menhir, a standing stone, in pictures or from your own travels in western Europe, those are the monuments I'm talking about. People assumed, based on radiocarbon dates that were early to come out, that this was an example of what we call diffusion. Diffusion: an idea is generated in one place, preferably a civilized center that shows up in ancient history books like Egypt or Greece or the Near East, Mesopotamia, the light bulb is turned on

there and then rays spread outward into the darkness. Or if you want to think of dropping a pebble in a pond and the ripples spread across the pond, that's diffusion, the diffusion of the ideas.

Well now we know diffusion happens. Mr. Levi Strauss, out there in the minefields of California, in the gold rush invents what we call blue jeans or Levis in honor of him out of material he meant to make into tents, and it diffuses from that spot all over the world. There are many products, many inventions that we do know were invented in one place and then spread. It was assumed that the megaliths were that because they looked like they were younger, more recent than the pyramids in Egypt, than the great shaft tombs at Mycenae, where tradition said Agamemnon and his family, famous from the Trojan War, had been buried. It must all start in a civilized place, with writing and literature and fine art, and then spread out in crude form to the periphery. That was the diffusionist model.

Along came a revolution in radiocarbon dating. It started in the '60s. It was based on tree ring dating, where archaeologists could actually calibrate exactly the fluctuations in the amount of radioactive carbon that was in the atmosphere. They learned that it wasn't a constant amount. They learned that they had been miscalculating certain eras and miscalculating certain dates. When they went back and ran the dates for the megaliths in Brittany, in Portugal, in Ireland, they found that in almost every case, the big monuments were earlier than the pyramids. This was the first big stone architecture in history.

This gave a totally different view. It tremendously enhanced interest in the megaliths. It was then realized, of course, megaliths had been made in other parts of the world as well. Megaliths are found on the island of Madagascar, on the islands of New Guinea and Borneo. They certainly were not diffused from Egypt. They weren't diffused from Brittany or Portugal or Ireland either. They were independently invented. However, through ethnographic parallels, that concept I introduced you to earlier, we can get some insights into possible motives for our long lost ancient Atlantic European farmers, who way back between 4500 B.C. and about 3000 B.C. were busy building these megalithic monuments all over that land. We can get some insights into what might have been their motives. In some cases, as we will see, the monuments themselves speak very directly to us even though they are just silent stones.

Now, many of you have seen a movie called *The Raiders of the Lost Ark* and in one of the early scenes, Indiana Jones—our archetypal archaeologist—is standing in front of a class and lecturing to them about something before he's dragged out to deal with this lost ark. What he's talking about are some passage graves and gallery graves in Brittany. I would like to begin our discussion by talking about the different kinds of megalithic monuments, building up in your mind a little catalog of types because they have different meanings, different purposes. They will lead us in different directions.

First of all, there's the simplest megalithic monument of all. You find a gigantic elongated block of stone, something perhaps shaped by glacial action, a glacial erratic as it's called, left on the landscape by the retreating ice, and you drag it to a place where you can dig a deep pit. Then with ropes around its tip and a little bit of wooden, sort of a crib around the edge of the earthen hole that it's going into so it won't tear up the earth, you haul that end up in the air and tip it, foot first into the pit. You've raised what's called a menhir in Brittany. The Briton language is a Celtic language. Menhir means standing stone, the M-E-N is the stone part. We'll talk about what those can represent. That's one form of megalithic monument, the menhir.

If you put menhirs in rows, you've got yet another kind of megalithic monument that are the famous site called Carnac in Brittany. This has nothing to do with the Egyptian Karnak. We have rows of standing stones that seem to reach almost to the horizons, dozens of them. So you are within a complete sacred landscape of these standing stones, all in neat, straight lines. That's one kind of megalithic monument—big stone monument. Now another kind that was very popular was called the dolmen—there's our M-E-N again, stone. What does D-O-L mean? It means table in that ancient Briton Celtic tongue.

So how do you make a table out of stones? Now you work not with elongated shafts of stone, but with flat slabs of stone. You bring them to the place where you're going to erect this stone table, and you tip them up on their edges, three or four in a square box pattern. Remember our square and rectangular rooms, way back in there in Çatalhöyük, that are now becoming the normal place for everyone to live, for creating a chamber with corners where the slabs come together. Then you're going to put a capstone on top, a capstone that

weighs tons. How are you going to do this? You're going to heap up earth, inside and outside that chamber you created. The earth makes a ramp on the outside, a smooth ascent to the level, to the top of your little square of stones. You are going to get on the other side and with long ropes drag the capstone up. What's the biggest capstone that's on top of one of these arrangements? It's believed to weigh about 50 tons and must have taken hundreds of people with a lot of time on their hands and a lot of organization to drag it to the top and cap that stone table.

If you travel around western Europe you'll see many of them in Portugal, many of them in Brittany. You will see these dolmens dotting the landscape. Today they are bare, I think it's safe to say that most of them were probably covered with earth so that they were like artificial caves. We have certainly seen what a role that cave had to play in religious sensibilities throughout human history. Here is a way of creating in the landscape a little artificial cave, a little chamber into you which you could walk, and as we will talk about the kind of encounter you will have once you are inside. However, I think they are covered over, in most cases, with earth to begin with. So there's our second kind: menhirs first then dolmens.

Now we can create different kinds of things relating to the dolmen. Perhaps we have the dolmen as the center of a mound and a passageway where we've got a row of upright slabs and another parallel row defining a passage and then capstones, miniature versions of our dolmen capstone, all along. We heap the earth over that. We've created a passage grave. Then if we forget about the dolmen and just have a very long passage running through the middle of an oblong mound, we have a gallery grave. Some other possibilities, other changes and variations we can make, but those are the essential elements I'd like to you remember, except for one more that we'll get to in a moment—the menhir, the dolmen, the passage grave, the gallery grave.

The one other one that is going to lead us to Stonehenge eventually is called, in Britain, the cromlech, and that is a circle of standing stones, a circle of menhirs. What are these for? Why are they there? A very obvious thing that they are is funerary. You've already caught onto that from the fact that I was talking about passage graves, gallery graves.

What's inside these places? What are being housed in glory inside these gigantic stone structures? Unlike anything that the living are actually dwelling in because they're just in simple homes and huts, inside are the ancestors. These are mausoleums. Based on ethnographic parallels with places like Borneo and Madagascar and New Guinea, the menhirs are most likely being raised in honor of specific people, big men or big women, heads of communities. We're not sure which sex was dominant in this Neolithic movement. Certainly the women seemed to have a great deal of ritual and religious power in their hands—remember our goddess figures showing up so strongly at Çatalhöyük. It may be that it's not until the men muscle in with domesticated animals harnessed to the plows and harnessed the carts with the intensive agriculture that replaces that first phase when the women were in fact planting the crops and harvesting in a way that we could still in the 18th century and with the Iroquois tribes up in upper New York state, where the women did all of the planting side of the division of labor. So the women may have been in charge.

At any rate, big men or big women, whoever it is, the menhirs are very likely being raised to commemorate some act of theirs or just their lives, just a memorial to them. We have wonderful descriptions of big men in Borneo or New Guinea giving great feasts so that people will drag a stone from a great distance. Dragging it a big distance seems to be part of the power or the magic. The spiritual force is showing that you can defy anyone's expectations of the possible and draw that huge stone across the landscape and erect it in honor of that chief as a lasting memorial. It may be just generically to his memory. It might be for a victory that was scored in a conflict between tribes. Because as soon as you get into planting crops and hoarding the harvest, you are into butting heads over resources with your neighbors. You've got something that everybody would like to get hold of in the lean years. So, warfare is going to become a perennial endemic thing with farming communities. Or it could be for something like arranging a pact between two tribes, or adopting a child and marking that new entry of a member into the family by raising a standing stone.

So the standing stones are not always strictly funerary, but the other structures are. They were meant as mausoleums for groups that had claimed a piece of land. And somewhere near the center of that land, they would erect a house for their dead. You should be thinking now

back to Thomas Jefferson and that Indian mound by the Rivanna River with which we started in our first lecture. That idea of a hub of the wheel put to that central place were gathered the bones of the ancestors and kept there in perpetuity. The dolmens, the passage graves, the gallery graves, when they were excavated in the 20th century, if they had not already been broken open and robbed and disarranged, were full of skeletons and offerings to the dead. In fact, everyday things that they'd used in life, the pottery that they had eaten from or drunk from, the tools that they had used, the weapons that the men had handled, the ornaments that people of either sex had worn, they were in there in the tombs with them, with that old idea: so ancient, you can take it with you.

This tells us something very important about the attitude of these farmers to the dead and the difference from what they left behind in Çatalhöyük and that point of origin. In Çatalhöyük, the dead are living in the house under the floor with you. You don't bury them with elaborate grave goods in most cases, because they haven't gone anywhere. They're right there. They're still part of the family. With the megaliths, that has changed. The families live apart from that sacred center which is the set of tombs for the honored dead, the ancestors. The family may still be rotating around that. In many cases early farmers would move within a territory. They would let land lie fallow for a period, they would let the trees grow back, and then come back and slash and burn them so the soil was enriched and fertilized with the potash from the burning. Yet always, they would have as the center of their territory this Neolithic monument. Studies have been done of the placement of these Neolithic, megalithic monuments to show that they're often in the middle of tracts of farming land.

These people have a sense of land ownership. Hunters and gatherers, remember, don't have that. There are beautiful speeches by some of the last of the tribal leaders in America as the great march of "civilization" is carrying our United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific. A few eloquent speakers of the native groups, people like the council standing in the way and articulating the thought of those earlier people who were more nomadic and depended more on their skills with hunting game. Sell a country? Why not sell the air, the sea, the sky? Were they not all made for the use of his children by the great father? This idea that the earth should be open to all is a hunting and gathering idea. Farmers depend on the concept that this

land is ours. We are a community of farmers. Our ancestors brought us here, and the proof that we own this land is here in tons of stone with the bones of our ancestors inside. This is our evidence. This is our testament to the world that this land belongs to us, that it has for generations, and it always will because we will continue to honor our ancestors here.

In Çatalhöyük, the dead are with you. In Brittany, in Portugal, in Spain, in France, in Britain and Ireland, you go and visit the ancestors. You carry the newly dead into that little chamber or enclosure or passage where the others are lined up. You place them there with the things they will need because they are, in a sense, on a journey. A concept that we will be encountering again with the Egyptian pharaohs and ordinary people in Egypt that death is the beginning of the journey in which you need to be equipped, is beginning for us here very clearly in these megalithic tombs. So that idea of creating gigantic, religious markers on the landscape that establish this land is yours, something we will find going on through the ages as an element of human religion, we can first see it really clearly here in Atlantic Europe with the building of these megaliths.

There's another element too. In the south side of Brittany, there's a site called Gavr'inis which is a very unusual tomb. It's much bigger than the others. It's got a huge dolmen-like chamber and then a passage to the outside. The passage faces roughly toward the west. Then it was heaped over with earth, but unlike most of the Brittany megaliths, where the stones are rough and undecorated, the stones at Gavr'inis are decorated with spirals and strange symbolic shapes. Where do we find their like? We must go about 250 miles north to Ireland to a place called Newgrange, the biggest Neolithic megalithic monument in Ireland where we have almost the same building. Newgrange is bigger. It's about 100 yards across, this huge mound. It's got 97 huge slabs of stone all in a circle around it and a passageway that leads to the heart of your mound, and there's your chamber, not with a single capstone but with a corbelled vault of lots of inward tilting stones that eventually go up about 20 feet over your head. There are basins and bowls and little cist things of stone that probably held bones and ashes of the ancestors.

The new element that we're experiencing here is these spots were probably not just places to put the ancestors to rest, know they're there and venerate them. These seem to be places of ritual. We may

be standing inside the world's first real temples when we stand inside sites like Newgrange in Ireland. You pass up that passageway, which is clearly meant to be used. If you go on a mid-winter day, or preferably before dawn on mid-winter day, turn around and look back down the passage, you're looking at a transom opening in the stones above the door itself. As the sun comes up on mid-winter morning, the first shaft of light will beam straight down that long passage into the heart of darkness, into the heart of that mound, that artificial cave where you are standing. We don't know exactly the meaning, but we do know that to farmers the sun, the rain, the heavens were important, indeed crucial for existence in a way they never had been for their hunting and gathering ancestors.

We can see the beginnings here at Newgrange, at Gavr'inis, in these masterpieces of megalithic and Neolithic architecture as a way of harnessing the sun. This was a way of marking the point when the sun, rising on midwinter day, the solstice is about to turn back toward life, having been going through all of these months downward into its shortest and coldest time, the great revival marked by these monuments.

We see here the beginnings of gigantic architecture, sacred landscapes, and what we call cultural or archaeoastronomy all in the megaliths of Atlantic Europe.

Lecture Seven

Towers and Tombs of Sumeria

Scope:

The decipherment of cuneiform script in the 19th century led to the discovery of a hitherto unknown people in southern Mesopotamia: the Sumerians. One of the first of their cities to be explored was Ur, hometown of Abraham, according to Genesis. In the 1920s, archaeologist Leonard Woolley discovered royal tombs of the 3rd millennium B.C. with fine mausoleums for the bodies and treasures of Ur's kings and queens, as well as outer zones filled with dozens of human sacrifices, apparently willing members of the court. At nearby Eridu, the "first city" of Sumerian myth, archaeologists excavated an even older urban cemetery of more than 1,000 graves. Some men, women, and children were accompanied to the next world by their dogs, and one dog had even been supplied with a bone for food in the afterlife. The poignancy of these tombs echoes the anguish over death expressed in the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh.

Outline

- I. This part of our course is devoted to the religion that surrounds death and burial. We are also making a transition to Mesopotamia and to the city, Ur, where we will find many documents written in cuneiform.
 - A. These cuneiform tablets include a list of the kings of Mesopotamia and the record of a great flood.
 - B. Cuneiform records have revealed to us the traditions of Sumeria, Mesopotamia, and Ur itself.
 - C. We also owe to cuneiform the preservation of the Epic of Gilgamesh.
 - D. The Third Dynasty of Ur dominated the period we will study, about 2650–2500 B.C.

- II. The kings of the Third Dynasty created a royal cemetery at Ur, which was excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley.
 - A. Ur had been inhabited for thousands of years before its abandonment in about 500 B.C., so Woolley had a lot of layers to work through.

- B. What really appealed to him was the idea of the biblical connections to the stories of Abraham and the Great Flood.
- C. The tablets revealed a world of named gods that mirrored the earthly royalty.
- D. Woolley found a very complicated stratigraphy, yet he was able to find the sort of ceremonial center of the community around the ziggurat.
- E. The ziggurat proved to be part of a much larger ceremonial area.

- III. The grave that changed Woolley's life, archaeology, and our view of early religion was the grave of a woman we now call Queen Pu-abi.
 - A. The grave tested the abilities of archaeologists to excavate fragile materials in the field in an unprecedented way.
 - B. What was remarkable was that Pu-abi had not gone to the next world alone. At least 60 other people went with the queen as her attendants.
 - C. These sacrifices included the bodies of many young women; lyre players; oxen and their grooms; and five contorted skeletons of soldiers.
 - D. It seems the soldiers had systematically killed everybody else down in that tomb, then were sacrificed as well.
 - E. A recent study contends that the women were struck with a sharp object in the temple, then incinerated, dressed, and carried down into the pit. However it was arranged, we don't have any evidence of a struggle.
 - F. What happened at Ur is not unique; it was a practice that we will encounter in other civilizations on other continents.
 - G. The cemeteries of the city dwellers of Ur were also within the tell, and Woolley excavated 1,850 tombs of ordinary people and found their belongings with them as well.
 - H. In many of the tombs Woolley excavated, he found belongings of the deceased buried with them. At a nearby site, Eridu, the dead were buried with their dogs.

IV. The Epic of Gilgamesh describes a precedent for what Woolley found at Ur.

- A. When Gilgamesh dies, an immense funeral is held for him, and his wife, members of his family, and members of his court, willingly go down into his tomb and lie down so that they can accompany this great king to the next world.
 - B. On closer study, some of the answers to the questions of Sumerian religion and belief were enshrined in that epic text.
- V.** Woolley also found two more things.
- A. Woolley found that Abraham did indeed come from a city of idols and human sacrifice, but these are rejected by all three of the religions that claim descent from Abraham.
 - B. At the very bottom of Ur, Woolley found a thick layer of flood deposits with more human remains underneath, thereby satisfying those who were looking for evidence of events of the book of Genesis.

Questions to Consider:

1. Mesopotamian peoples visualized the gods as residing “in heaven.” Is this a natural concept, or is it socially conditioned by the way these early farmers and city dwellers lived?
2. In the death pits at Ur, religious conviction seems to have dominated over the primal will to live. Over what other primal instincts and urges can religious beliefs prevail? Do religions in fact tend to encourage a denial of basic physical urges?

Lecture Seven—Transcript

Towers and Tombs of Sumeria

Welcome back. With this lecture we embark on a new part of our course devoted to the religion that surrounds death and burial. However, we are making another transition. So far, we have been in the world of prehistory, all those megaliths, all those caves, they belong to a time before written historical records. We now move to Mesopotamia. We move to some of the early experiments in writing, and we move to a city, Ur, where we will find many documents. People have been finding them at Ur since the middle of the 19th century written in a kind of script called cuneiform.

On these cuneiform tablets, there are histories. There is a king list of the kings of Mesopotamia, the kings of what was called Sumeria, that land down near the mouth of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. Mesopotamia means “the land between the rivers” and the rivers are the Tigris and the Euphrates. There was a whole set of city states there, 20 or 30 of them. They each had their own king. But at times, one king would conquer the rest and take over as an overlord and then become king of the entire realm. Then another city would rise to power, and they would become those kings listed on the king list. The king list begins with a period of eight kings who reigned for a total of 241,000 plus years, at which point there was a great flood. If that sounds biblical, it should, because there are many biblical elements to Sumeria in general and to this city of Ur in particular, where we will be going to look at an extraordinary set of royal burials. This, according to the book of Genesis, is Abraham’s hometown. So at Ur, this tell down there in southern Mesopotamia, we are confronting the place where the patriarch was born who lies behind the Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Now those kings came back after the floods and continued to rule in their cities. The adventures of one of them were recorded in this script that we call cuneiform. I’d like to take a moment to talk about cuneiform itself because this bright light that is shown for us upon the traditions of Sumeria, Mesopotamia, Ur itself, is all thanks to cuneiform writing. Sometime about 5,000 years ago, scribes, ordinary record keepers, working for those leaders, those kings, those heads of cities, down there in Sumeria, began to experiment with using a script to notate ordinary daily transactions. Hieroglyphics, which we will encounter with the Egyptians and the

Mayans, that means sacred writing, priest's writing. Their writing systems began through a religious impulse. Cuneiform is different. Cuneiform is a practical system, which was then picked up and used by many different languages because it was in part phonetic, in part characters that represented as ideograms complete thoughts or objects, a very difficult script to learn, but nonetheless useful over a wide area. It became the ordinary script of the Near East for thousands of years.

We have an example here of a replica closely modeled after a medical document that came from Mesopotamia, and the original is in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The scribes would take a brick-like or flattened brick-like tablet of clay from the banks of the Tigris or the Euphrates. So it was very cheap to get the writing materials. Then they would take a stylus that had, at its working end, a little point that was in the shape of narrow, triangular, wedge. *Cuneus* is Latin for wedge—cuneiform writing shaped like wedges. They would place these triangular marks in lines onto the surface of the tablet and were able to get reams of information onto each one of these tablets. We owe to this cuneiform writing, not only our records of the Sumerian kings and their adventures, we also owe to the cuneiform writing the preservation of one of the world's most important literary works, the Epic of Gilgamesh.

I mentioned that there was a literary work about one of these Sumerian kings. He is Gilgamesh. He was one of those kings in the Sumerian king list and his superhuman adventures with gods, with folk heroes like this wild man Enkidu, with visits across the water to find Utanapishtim, the man who had survived the great flood that I just mentioned was already part of the Sumerian king list historical record. What is he doing? He's trying to understand life and death. He's trying to understand what he can do to be a good king, a good friend, but above all, how to overcome death. This is his quest. The Epic of Gilgamesh remained popular in the Near East for thousands of years then was lost and forgotten with the last person who could read cuneiform tablets.

One of the glories of the decipherment of this script started with an English cryptographer named Sir Henry Rawlinson back in the 1840s. He used documents which had known languages in known scripts parallel to cuneiform versions of the same scripts in order to crack the code. Things that were a bit like the Rosetta Stone for the

Egyptian hieroglyphs. Henry Rawlinson, through his discoveries, led to people finding bits and pieces of this Epic of Gilgamesh, all over the Near East, piecing them together and working out the whole adventure—which included, of course, this account of the flood that sounded so much like the biblical flood.

Now on that Sumerian king list that's in the cuneiform tablets, appeared a third dynasty of Ur, and that's the one that concerns us in this lecture with the calendrical dates we would assign to it the years about 2650 B.C. to 2500 B.C. If you want to wonder what else is going on in the world, they're building the pyramids in Egypt and Stonehenge is rising on Salisbury Plain. The kings of the third dynasty are a group who created a royal cemetery at Ur, which was excavated by a very famous archaeologist named Leonard Woolley. In the 1920s and 1930s, the most headline-grabbing dig in the world—outside Howard Carter's discovery of King Tutankhamen in Egypt in the Valley of the Kings—was what Leonard Woolley was doing at Ur. Leonard Woolley took a large team to this great tell. Ur had been inhabited for thousands of years before its abandonment in about 500 B.C., so he had a lot of layers to work through. He didn't know fully what to expect. He knew there would be the remains of the kings, but what really appealed to him was the idea of the biblical connections, with Abraham, with the stories of the flood and so on with this site Ur. In fact, according to Genesis, Abraham's own father had been a maker of idols for the gods of Ur.

One thing that the tablets had revealed was we're now in a world of named gods. Up there in the sky, there are in fact deities like families, like dynasties of rulers here on earth in these city states of our new world based on agriculture and booming with population. We have gods that mirror the royalty here on Earth, and gods like Inanna and Shamash and so on—Marduk—these are great gods of Mesopotamia who are represented on the tablets and whose temples Woolley could hope to find at Ur. He started digging at the top of the mound, and he worked his way down. He found, of course, that it was very complicated stratigraphy. It was complicated because people of one level had dug deep down into the levels below so that things were, in many cases, stirred up. Yet he was able to find the sort of ceremonial center of the community. Now remember back to Çatalhöyük, that sort of pueblo-like grid or little square and rectangular room all together with party walls? Ur is very different.

We've got town planning. We've got a surrounding city wall for defense. We've got a street plan. We've got a ceremonial center around the single largest feature in the town, a ziggurat.

Just think zigzag for ziggurats because that is their profile as you see them in the setting sun, a row of zigzag lines outline a building that is in fact a stepped pyramid coming up to a peak at the top that would have had—according to the Greek Herodotus, the Greek historian—a shrine or a temple to a god on top of this stepped pyramid, the ziggurat. More than 30 of these are known from all over Mesopotamia. Each great city had one. The ziggurat that was in Babylon, which by this time had already been excavated, is the biblical tower of Babel from the book of Genesis. So Woolley was thrilled to find another one here at Ur, much better preserved than the one at Babylon and to find at its base the courtyard complex of which the ziggurat was the center. The complex that included places for slaughtering sacrificial animals, altars for making the offerings to the gods, places for the priests to bathe and purify themselves for the rituals, dwelling places for the priests, storehouses for ritual equipment. Because of that little temple up on the top, where one went up and talked to the gods and observed the heavens—remember from our megaliths this new importance that's being given by religious figures to the movements of the heavenly bodies. The Babylonians, the Sumerians, they were great star watchers, and it was from the tops of the ziggurats that they could get high up above the town and look out after the flat flood plain of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

The ziggurat proved to be part of a much larger ceremonial area and in one corner of that Woolley found pits, deep pits dug down from the level of the third dynasty of Ur, that middle of the 3rd millennium B.C., deep down into the lower parts of the mound. As I said, he ultimately found 16 chambers, some built of stone, which of course, doesn't exist down there near the mouths of the Tigris and the Euphrates. It has to be imported from a distance. Stone chambers set down in pits and then there had been ramps leading down the sides of the pits so you could access the place of the royal mausoleum. There were kings and queens, or at least royalty, both male and female, down in these pits. Some of the names did not match anything on the familiar Sumerian king list, which showed the king lists were not complete. There were two kings involved in these third

dynasty burials. There names were on bowls and inscriptions in cuneiform, but didn't even show up on the king list.

The grave that changed Woolley's life, changed archaeology, changed our view of early religion, was the grave not of a king, but of a woman. Probably what we should call a queen. The cuneiform has changed its phonetic equivalence through the 150 years that people have been deciphering it. We now call this queen Pu-abi. She was inside this little stone chamber in the heart of her pit, her royal grave pit. However, she wasn't the big news, although she was fabulously adorned with hair pieces of gold and jewels. Lots of treasures were in the tomb with her. No, what was amazing was what was outside in the larger pit. She had not gone to the next world alone. She had been accompanied by at least 60 other people who had come down that ramp, taken places inside the pit, as Woolley envisioned it from where he found them, and ultimately died and went to the next world with the queen as her attendants.

Now this discovery tested the abilities of archaeologists to excavate fragile materials in the field in a way that was unprecedented. The soil of the mound was very acidic; most bone had already been eaten away or decayed. Wood had disappeared and many of the objects, the treasures that had been put down in that grave pit to go with the queen to the next world, the wood too had decayed. A famous example involves a lire or harp. The original had the gold head of a bull, still a very sacred animal after all these millennia, at its base. Then it had the body of the musical instrument in wood, but with gold, with lapis lazuli, with shell, precious stones all over it, a sort of veneer, an encrustation of these precious stones and gold. At first, Woolley didn't see the harp or lire. What he saw were two holes in the ground. We now know those were the tops of the shafts where the wood had rotted, leaving nothing behind except a negative of the harp, the lire, with all that encrustation of gold and gems pressed against the surrounding soil at the edge of the negative.

On a hunch, thinking of the way that ever since the middle of the 19th century, Italian archaeologists working at Pompeii had found little holes and pored soft plaster of Paris into those holes and blown it around so it filled the cavity. Then when they took this surrounding matrix of earth away, there would be a human body revealed, the form now in plaster of Paris of someone who had died in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Leonard Woolley remembered that, and he

poured into those two holes plaster of Paris, went home, let it dry, came back the next day, dug down and there was the lire. Not only had the plaster of Paris reformed this beautiful musical instrument which must have accompanied these religious ceremonies—we hear lots in the Bible and in Egyptian and Sumerian records about harp music and lire music and hymns and psalms—but the gold and the gems had been picked up by the plaster of Paris so the thing looked like itself again as he lifted it out of the ground.

He used this technique on a number of other things, including a pair of statues that showed what he called a ram in a thicket. This is Abraham's hometown. One of the things that Genesis tells us about is a situation in which Abraham receives a divine impulse from above to sacrifice his son Isaac. He takes Isaac up to a stone, this broad natural surface, to sacrifice his son when an angel comes, dashes the knife from his hand, and instead shows him a ram caught in a thicket, a scapegoat who will stand in for his son. This extraordinary scene of sacrifice seemed to have some roots back in Ur, here were human sacrifices in this tomb. Yet more than that, this extraordinary sculpture which was recovered in much the same way with plaster of Paris as the harp or lire had been, it showed what Woolley said was a ram standing up on his hindquarters in a thicket with shrubs and branches and flowers all around. He said this shows that that motif of the sacrifice and the thicket came from Abraham's hometown, that this was an ancient tradition. He wrote this back to the people who were supporting him, which included a lot of people who were interested in links between archaeological discoveries and the Old Testament and the money kept flowing to support his archaeological excavations. In fact, it's a goat; rams don't get up and eat in shrubs on their hind legs, but goats do it all the time. In fact, there were at least two of them; they probably supported something on their golden horns. However, to the general point that we have an image here very reminiscent of the Biblical narrative, Woolley was absolutely correct to say that.

The big deal, however, were these sacrifices. Most of them were the bodies of young women, beautifully dressed and arrayed almost with equal splendor to the queen herself. Laid out in rows, no signs of a struggle, no sign that anyone had objected to what was happening to them. Near them were the harpers, the lire players. There were carts—you can tell from the shadows in the soil, although the wood had rotted away—oxcarts. Here were the skeletons of the oxen that

had drawn them down. Here were the grooms, these young men who had come down, tending the animals, bringing the oxcarts, which may have been full of cloth or some other precious thing that did not survive the 2,500 years in the pit. All of this down in what he called the death pit. Then on the ramp leading out, which had been covered with matting and woven reeds, he found five skeletons that he felt were contorted. He judged from their helmets, their armor, and the swords or daggers in their hand that, A, they were soldiers, and B, they were left there, sacrificed as an honor guard protecting the tomb from spirits or from tomb robbers. But they had been the ones who went around and systematically killed everybody else down in that tomb. The others had died willingly, but the soldiers had not been told that they were going to be sacrificed, and Woolley interpreted their contortions as the death struggles of men who were being met by others on this ramp, killed, and then left behind to be buried over and attend their queen through all eternity.

Given the condition of the bones, some of that scenario—and we archaeologists are always bringing up scenarios to try to explain what we see—some of that scenario may not be correct. In fact, it's been very recently challenged by a study that says that the heads of the women, which Woolley had to lift in order to get their elaborate gold headdresses out in chunks of earth and bring them back. That's some of the best quantity of bone material we have from the death pit. It suggests, first of all, that the women were struck with a sharp object in the temple to meet their end. That was how they were sacrificed. Also, that they were then subject to some sort of incineration, dressed, their charred corpses, in their finery and carried down into the pit. That's a very new theory. We'll see how it holds up to scrutiny and to practical discussions of how the pit was arranged.

However it was arranged, we don't have any evidence of a struggle. The point I'd like to make about this is we feel that the primal instinct of humans, indeed of all living things, is the will to survive, the struggle to live. Somehow, religion has reached such a dominant station in the lives of these city dwellers down there in Mesopotamia, these subjects of these kings and queens, that it can actually override or short circuit that primal impulse, that will to live, and these people are happy to go to the next world.

Woolley pointed something out that he had discovered which is actually very hard to understand in terms of the more recent idea that

they might have been killed above and then carried down into the pit. He could identify the heads, the hands, some of the features of the bodies as he was excavating. There was one young woman who had the bones of her hand tightly clutched. Inside that clutched hand was a silver ribbon, the headdresses were made up of ribbons of silver and gold and spangles and dangles and so on. Most of the young women seemed to have had their silver ribbons woven already through their hair. Yet this young woman, the one out of dozens, still had hers in a coil in her hand. Woolley put an unforgettable take, an unforgettable interpretation on this, when he wrote in his report that he believed she had come late to the ceremony and that she had been holding in her hand the little coiled silver ribbon that she had not had time to put on when she was still at home and hoped to have to time during the preparations for the ceremony to get it into her hair, but never did. She went to her death down in that pit, still holding the ribbon, walking down with the rest, and then killed by those five guards along with all of her comrades.

If this seems incredible to you that human beings would submit to this. We're going to see soon enough in our course when we come to the great North American side of Cahokia, where kings, great chiefs, went to the next world surrounded by young women and many other human sacrifices. We're going to see that there is an ethnographic parallel from 17th-century America in which a European visitor observed and was briefed on such a scene of mass sacrifice at a Natchez town where mounds were being built in order to accommodate the bodies of dead chiefs and those who willingly volunteered to go with them. We'll cover the details of that in another lecture, but I just wanted you to understand that we have evidence that what happened at Ur is not unique. That in fact, it was a practice that we will encounter again and again in other civilizations on other continents. At widely different periods in time, this idea of the human sacrifice was something done willingly.

If we want to try to wrap our minds around it because it's so alien to anything in our culture to think that this could be a good or noble thing, we just have to ask ourselves, what do we think are the good and noble deaths in this world? Well, there are death for others. The firefighter who willingly goes into the burning building to save one person knowing that may be at the cost of the firefighter's own life or the war hero who's up and out of the trench, drawing fire from the enemy to save the comrades back in the trench. Those kinds of

sacrifices we honor, we celebrate, and we erect statues to. Based on the Natchez example, it may well be that the people who were family members, clan members of those who sacrificed themselves, felt the same way, that this sacrifice had been for the good all. In this material world, their survivors were elevated in public estimation because some of the family had gone with that king, with that queen, with that leader, into the next world ahead of the rest.

Whatever was in their minds, it is religion that put it there. It is religion that made it seem the right thing to do. Now Woolley spent a long time on this vast death pit at Ur, the one of the lady or the queen Pu-abi. I can't imagine a more difficult archaeological site has ever been excavated than that, given the complexity of the site, the sensational nature of what he was finding, and the fragility of the remains. All of this made it a tremendous challenge, which he met triumphantly.

We have insights into what was going at Ur during Woolley's time there because he was visited by a stream of people, but one of them was a young woman from England who was going to make her name a writer, a writer of mystery stories. Her name is familiar to us, Agatha Christie. She came out and spent a lot of time there. She became fascinated by archaeological work, after all, its mysteries also. She set several of her famous mystery novels at archaeological digs in the Near East. It became part of her own life because she fell in love with one of Leonard Woolley's assistants, an archaeologist named Max Mallowan, who went on to become distinguished in Near Eastern archaeology himself. Agatha Christie often went back to these tell sites with him. She said a beautiful thing about what it is to be married to an archaeologist claiming that the older she got, the more interesting he found her.

Now Ur didn't just yield cemeteries of kings. Ur of course had a large population. In fact, Mesopotamia and Sumeria at this time is an anomaly in early agricultural societies. You often hear a figure for early America, Jeffersonian America, 90 percent of the population living out on farms, in the agricultural landscape and only about 10 percent in cities. It's estimated that in Sumeria, 80 percent lived in cities and went from those walled strongholds out into their fields. So these are urban dwellers with the pressures of urban society forming their minds and their attitudes. Their cemeteries, the cemeteries of these city dwellers, were within the tell at Ur also.

Woolley ended up excavating 1,850 tombs of ordinary people. He began to sense that they had been part of the same mindset as those kings and those queens in the royal pits: the idea that one goes in death on a journey to another place, and that ones' loved ones need to supply you for that journey with precious things that belong to you, with comfortable clothing to wear. In so many of the tombs that he excavated, he found belongings of the deceased there with them.

At a nearby site, Eridu, one of these other Sumerian tell sites, an even more remarkable thing was found in the common cemetery to show that the ideas that we see on the top of society, that the pinnacle with the kings and queens percolate down, or perhaps it's the other way around, the common ideas of the people flow up to the kings and the rulers. At any rate, at Eridu, the dead were buried, in many cases, with their dogs. It's very unlikely that master and dog died at the same time. So these are dog sacrifices in the tombs, in these Sumerian tombs of the city dwellers at Eridu going along to the next world with their masters. In the same way that those 60 people, who were in the death pit at Ur, went along with Queen Pu-abi into that afterlife to accompany her to the next world.

It turned out that that Epic of Gilgamesh, which we talked about earlier, had a precedent for what Woolley found at Ur. When Gilgamesh finally realizes he must die just as his beloved friend Enkidu has already died and gone down to the world of the shades, Gilgamesh passes away. An immense funeral is held for him and his wife, members of his family, members of his court, willingly go down into his tomb and lie down so that they can accompany this great king to the next world. It turned out on closer study that long before Leonard Woolley went to Ur, long before archaeologists decided to tackle with the spade the questions of Sumerian religion and belief, some of the answers were already there enshrined in that wonderful epic text. A clue to us that now, in our researches through the world, in many cases we will have the voices of those ancient people to help supplement what the archaeologists are finding in the ground to help bring to life these extraordinary records of religious belief, religious ritual, religious sacrifice, such as Leonard Woolley found at Ur.

Abraham did indeed come from a city of idols, of places where there were statues of gods. He came from a place where human sacrifice was practiced. He came from a place that had an entire world of

belief and attitudes to religion that all three of the religions that claim descent from him have chosen to reject through monotheism and through a very strong denial of the rightness of human sacrifice.

Finally at the very bottom of Ur, Woolley found a thick layer of flood deposits with more human remains underneath. He had satisfied those who were looking for the very beginnings of the book of Genesis, Noah's flood, with his deepest pit and his most sensational find.

Lecture Eight

Tomb of the First Emperor of China

Scope:

The terracotta army of Qin Shihuangdi, first unifier and emperor of China, has surpassed Peking Man as the best-known Chinese archaeological discovery. The emperor died in 210 B.C., but his extraordinary tomb complex with its thousands of statues of soldiers, horses, and chariots had been in preparation for years. Most recognize the artistry of the life-size figures; few reflect on the religious beliefs that inspired them: an attempt to achieve immortality through an extension of traditional Chinese ancestor worship. The warriors took the place of human sacrifices and would have provided the emperor with a powerful escort when he entered the next world. The actual tomb, which has yet to be excavated, was a model of the cosmos. Ideas of divine kingship that took generations to evolve in Egypt had emerged in China within the lifespan of a single ruler.

Outline

- I. For the second of our case studies of burials, we visit the first emperor of China's tomb.
 - A. In March 1974, farmers near Mount Li sank some wells and found a lost army of life-size terracotta warriors.
 - B. The spot, near the mountain and the river must have been laid out by geomancers.
 - C. As the Chinese archaeologists dug down, they discovered that the pit was one of four.
 - D. Each of the many statues of horses and men was unique.
 - E. The statues give us a very clear idea of this first emperor's military units.
 - F. In the West, we think of the terracotta warriors as the tomb of the emperor, but they're not the same.

- II. We will examine the tomb, then talk about the emperor of China.
 - A. Emperor Qin Shihuangdi started working on his tomb as soon as he came to the throne at the age of 13.

- B. In the middle of the tomb complex, there was an artificial hill, and under that hill was a palace.
- C. Outside was a temple for worship of the emperor; he was trying to turn himself into a god.
- D. If we think about what he achieved, maybe his touch of megalomania is understandable: he conquered and united all of China.
- E. He was obsessed with the idea of his own immortality.
- F. The emperor's death was concealed for nine months after his son ascended to the throne. It was this son who commanded that all the concubines who had not produced children be put in the tomb.

- III. Based on the evidence of the terracotta army, the emperor had developed the idea of scapegoats.
 - A. However ferocious he may have been, he has taken a humane step in allowing images of people rather than the human sacrifices themselves. This also happened in Egypt.
 - B. This explains why it was important to make the faces realistic. These are supposed to be real soldiers.

- IV. Neither the tomb nor the dynasty endured untouched.
 - A. As the Han came in and as the Qin were defeated, many of the people began to loathe this first emperor. A peasant army formed and ransacked the tomb.
 - B. Many of the terracotta warriors were knocked aside, and some were broken; their bronze weapons were taken.
 - C. The passage of time, meanwhile, took away the pigments.

- V. This tomb brings into play a couple of elements that will resound in some of our future lectures.
 - A. Like the Egyptian pharaohs, the first emperor had added a temple to his tomb for his own worship—the first known example in China of ancestor worship at a structure built near the tomb.
 - B. The idea that somebody who looked like a human being was, in fact, a god will lead to the extraordinary religious element of kings who become god-kings.

Suggested Reading:

Cotterell, *The First Emperor of China*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Qin Shihuangdi attempted to achieve immortality through the preparations for his extraordinary tomb. How do modern people seek to become immortal?
2. Should we expect to see a close link between kingship or political leadership and a dominant religious role?

Lecture Eight—Transcript**Tomb of the First Emperor of China**

Welcome back. For the second of our case studies of the religion surrounding burials, we are going to a tomb that was—for the second half of the 20th century in terms of extraordinary popular interest, spectacular discoveries, and real changes to the way we viewed those ancient kingdoms—a discovery that rivaled that of Woolley's at Ur back in the 1920s and '30s. I'm referring to the discovery, in 1974, of the tomb of the first emperor of China. It was March 1974, and farmers at a Chinese commune near a mountain called Mount Li in China decided to sink some wells. This is always that something I respond to because this is how Herculaneum was first discovered in 1738, that lost city buried by Mount Vesuvius by the sinking of a well.

In this case, the farmers did not find a lost city. Instead, they found a lost army. About 13 feet below the modern surface, they began to encounter terracotta figures. Terracotta is, of course, clay that's been baked, and these figures were giant, giant ceramic sculptures, life-size of men dressed in military or official uniforms with every button and fold in place. Their hair intricately arranged. Every face different, yet they had no weapons. And they were in rows, as if for a military parade. What were they?

There was no great mystery to the local people. They knew that a mile from the well diggings and the subsequent trenches that had revealed more of these buried terracotta warriors, stood the mountain, the artificial mountain, not Mount Li itself but a little mound. I shouldn't say all that little, it was about a quarter of a mile across, that represented the resting place of the first emperor of China, a man who had died in 210 B.C. There were records about the treasures and extraordinary fittings of that buried tomb. We'll talk about those in a little bit.

The spot must have been laid out by geomancers. This is a branch of religion we haven't encountered before. The word "mancy" or "mancer" comes from the Greek word *mantis*, a prophet. These were prophets who dealt with the earth. The modern Chinese practice of feng shui, that perceiving spiritual forces in a physical landscape of mountains, plains, water, goes back to these early geomancers who are part of the Taoist tradition. Now the Taoist tradition was alive, well, and strong in China at the time of the first emperor, as was

Confucianism. Confucius himself lived back in the 6th century B.C., about 300 years before the time of the first emperor himself.

So with these Geomantic principles, a place near the mountain and the river had been chosen for the tomb of this emperor. It was near his capital, his original place of administering his rule over his new empire. They called in the archaeologists from Beijing and there began the biggest archaeological project in Chinese history. We're going to be talking about some other digs on which Chinese archaeologists had been working, including the tombs of some much earlier emperors, the Shang dynasty emperors, at a place called Anyang, their capital and the oracle bones that they had practiced divination with. Chinese archaeologists were quite skilled. They had a great tradition of their own, a great interest in their own past, in bringing to light the remain of these ancient emperors.

Now, as they dug down, they discovered that the pit was one of four, side by side. And pit one was like a long, long gallery with warriors four abreast in, as I said, parade layout within the long gallery. At the front were chariots. There were not only men in these pits, but horses, not independent horses, but horses always harnessed to carts, to chariots, to places for dignitaries to ride or warriors to stand equipped with their weapons, the weapons all being missing. It was an extraordinary thing to find with all these thousands that even the horses were individualized. The men each had an individual face. So far, as they've looked through the hundreds that they've discovered, they can't find two that are the same in the face, although the bodies did indeed come out of molds. The heads were put on later with the individual physiognomies of what may have been portraits of the king's own army, his soldiers there, on the faces of the warriors that were in the tomb.

We get a very clear idea of this first emperor's military units, the kind of armor that they had, the divisions between the troops, the headdresses that they would wear—these were all ceremonial—and the chariots that they drove. This was the highest ranking part of the army, the chariooteers. The king himself would go into battle in a chariot. However, we don't know whether they were used to break up the infantry or whether they hung back. The size of these armies is hard for us to grasp for a society that's living in the 3rd century B.C. It's said that Qin alone—and Qin was that small state among many warring states of pre-imperial China that were at each other's

throats for domination—Qin alone was supposed to be able to get a million men into the field. As we look at the nature of China and its settlements at that time, that figure doesn't seem impossible. So we are looking at a small segment of that million-man army when we look at these elements of that tomb.

Now in the West, the terracotta warriors, those terracotta horses, they're very familiar to us. They've become icons of Chinese history. We think of them as the tomb of the emperor, but they're not. The tomb was described very specifically in ancient records. China, like Sumeria, developed a writing system of its own. Those Chinese characters which are seen today have an origin going back 3,000 years, and we're going to see some of those first characters when we study the oracle bones in a future lecture.

Early writings had given a description of the tomb of this emperor, which had said that from the central tomb there was a perimeter wall 3,000 feet across, and inside that wall were all kinds of other pavilions and features and so on, treasures that were going to accompany the emperor to the next world. This lay further out than that 3,000-foot perimeter. This was a mile away. This had not even been considered worthy of notice in the original descriptions of the tomb. If this was a side show so remote and so small-scale that it didn't even get into the documents, what in the world was the tomb like?

We're going to describe the tomb, and then we're going to talk a little bit about this incredible man, this emperor of China, this first emperor who had it created for him. It is said that he started working on his tomb as soon as he came to the throne at the age of 13. That would have been in 246 B.C. It was said that in the middle of the tomb complex, there was an artificial hill and that under that hill was a palace, roofed over but something that you could have entered and walked into and been in an open space. You would have done so at your peril, because just as there were warriors here in these outlying places, as we now know, there were bowmen, archers, placed around the interior of the main tomb with crossbows drawn and ready and trigger mechanisms. If you walked in the wrong place, they would have shot that arrow straight at you and transfix you—Indiana Jones, indeed. There were also supposed to be trip wires that would drop crushing weights or in some way kill you if you were to stumble across them. There were other dangers too, some that may not have been apparent to the people who built the tomb.

The king had wanted an image of his realm, of his empire laid out on a gigantic mat. The sea and the two great rivers of China, the Yellow River and the Yangtze were in mercury. And there were somehow devices that circulated the mercury so that the rivers ran from the mountains, down across the mat to the sea. There were images of the pavilions and the palaces of China, dotted around this mat. The Great Wall, which the first emperor had been among those to start to build, it was already present there. A whole world was laid out with fantastic adjoining works of art, a sort of subterranean city there under the ground and in it, the tomb of the first emperor himself. Outside he had built a temple so that he could be worshipped. He was trying to turn himself into a god.

You're probably aware that he was a Johnny-come-lately in that particular move as a monarch. He'd been preceded by people like the pharaohs of Egypt who took upon themselves the attributes of a god, a specific god—Horus—that they represented to their people as the incarnation of a certain deity. I think the first emperor wanted to be a brand new god. He took for himself a name. His own given name was Zheng but he took on the name Qin Shihuangdi. Qin is the dynasty name, that family of his—that royal family from which he was descended that ruled that little warring state of Qin. It wasn't little at all, but in the terms of the whole mosaic of Chinese politics at that time, it was just one of many. The shih part, transliterated—S-H-I-H—that means first; "uang," sovereign; and the "di" on the end—or originally translated into English, T-L, now more commonly D-I—what is that? That's a sign that goes all the way back to the oracle bones of the Shang dynasty and it meant something like divine ancestor.

So already in his life he is giving himself a divine title. He is trying to present himself as a god and, if we think about what he's achieved, maybe it's understandable that there's a little megalomania in his makeup. He'd come to the throne at 13, a little bit like Alexander the Great, who came to the throne very young also. He had a father who had built up a tremendous army, who'd been building walls along the northern perimeter of his kingdom of Qin, who'd been engulfing and devouring neighboring kingdoms. China had been in a state of squabbles and warfare for generations. It's called the warring state period. It's the period that gave rise to Confucius. There had been a great Shang kingdom, which in people's minds had been a time when the Chinese had been united.

That had given way to a Xia Dynasty that ruled China for a time. Then the country had fragmented into these different feudal states, each with its own ruling dynasty. Qin was simply one of those dynasties. We now call China by its common English name from Qin, from this home state of the first emperor.

Through a series of diplomatic moves, battles, lightning-like campaigns, he proved himself a great military genius and a terror to work with. He exercised the taking over of China. Then through his extraordinary administrative genius, he tied it together. He tied it together linguistically in the sense that although there were many languages, they all now used one script to write their language. He tied it together functionally with a system of highways and canals. He tied it together with that great increase to the Great Wall on the northern border that made for a very strong sense of "we are Chinese" to the south and those herding and mounted warrior barbarians to the north. He promoted agriculture. He thought of the common people and tried to improve their lot. He tried everything he could to make China strong.

Yet he was obsessed, at the same time, with the idea of his own immortality. Now I mentioned that there were these geomancers, these earth magicians, earth prophets at his court. He was surrounded by all kinds of intellectuals. The Confucian class, which is going to be brought forward in the dynasty that succeeds that Qin dynasty, is going to the Han emperors. They are going to bring the Confucians into the court procedure as the administrators of their empire. He had not yet done that, but he was surrounding himself with philosophers of different stripes, legalists, Taoists, perhaps some Confucianists as well, who formed an army around him and who he consulted because he wanted to create a structure of people, a human network of control that would reach to every corner of this vast dominion, the Middle Kingdom as the Chinese called it, and make sure that it was all tied firmly to him at the center.

He proclaimed that he was founding a dynasty that would last forever [through] the titles that he gave himself [and] the titles that he conferred posthumously on his father as the founder of this everlasting dynasty. He even named the second, third, fourth, members of the dynasty, and what their titles would be. He was trying to start a new world in China that would fuse together all that was strongest in the history of China. To do this, he took many lives.

The first ones, of course, were in his warfare. Then he began to have to put away opposition. It is said that 460 scholars were all buried alive at once for having disagreed with him. There were stories of the people who were working on the Great Wall of China, worked so hard by their taskmasters in what we call *cörvée*, a French word, or forced labor, that their bodies were simply chucked into the mass of the rubble inside the Great Wall as a little bit more material to raise that essential edifice of defense. He was a fearsome man.

He finally became so convinced of his own greatness that he had the people at the court inquire of the gods on the other side. There were gods in the Chinese religious system. They were not quite the familiar cast of characters we find among Sumerians, among Greeks, among Romans, each with their own immense number of myths and so on and their own very clear cut personalities, their own temples and priesthoods and so on. Yet certainly the sense that the gods were there and that the ancestors were there with them on the other side in the world of spirits, the invisible world, that was present. These prophets were asked to inquire of those on the other side: How could the first emperor become what he ought to be—a god—himself.

First of all, he wanted to live forever. So they were to inquire of the immortals could he get an elixir. Could he get some sort of a potion that would transform him into an immortal? That didn't pan out and at that point, he apparently decided, well I'm going to die but I'm going to go out as no human being has ever gone out before. I shall be recognized through all time as the person with the most incredible tomb. This tomb that he'd started on when he was 13, when he was still just monarch of Qin, that one small warring state, he now put—allegedly, according to the ancient documents—700,000 workers to create the most extraordinary tomb in the world. Then he began to travel about his kingdom, talking to people, seeing marvels. He went down the rivers to the sea.

He went out into the sea and from what we can see through the fantastical descriptions in the Chinese records, had an encounter with a whale and killed it. After that, he died near the seacoast. He was with a couple of ministers who realized that their future depended on the king not having died at that point. So they put him back in his carriage as a corpse and had the procession of the imperial court go back to the capital. When the body began to smell, as it inevitability did—proof of his humanity—they got a big cart of fish and carried it

alongside of the procession so no one could smell the decaying emperor. They got all the way back to the court and issued as if from the emperor himself edicts that his first son should commit suicide along with another troublemaker and that a much younger son should be the next emperor.

So the death of the emperor was concealed, according to the records. Nine months after his successor, his son, the second member of this Qin dynasty that was to last forever, ascended the throne. Nine months after that was the interment of his father. It was this son who commanded that all the concubines who had not produced children be put in the tomb. Now this was all in the records. It certainly gave the idea that if anyone ever found the tomb of the first emperor of China, they would also find many human sacrifices; they would find these young women, who had been put into the tomb with him. This wasn't unprecedented in China. If we go back to those earlier dynasties like the Shang, which we'll be visiting in detail when we talk about those rituals of the oracle bones, we'll see that they routinely had small numbers of human sacrifices put into the tomb with them. But the implication in the records was that many had gone with the first emperor to the next world so that he could be treated there as that D-I or T-I ending of his name implied: as the divine ancestor of the Chinese people through all time, as a man who had turned himself, by his own achievements, into a god.

What did they find instead? What did those farmers find in 1974? They found something very different. They found a king that, although we still don't know what was in the main tomb—that has not been opened and the Chinese archaeological service has no intention of opening it any time soon—that based on the evidence of the discovery of the terracotta army, he had developed the idea of scapegoats. These were images that could take the place of the persons who, in an older time and a more traditional religious ritual, would have been sacrificed as living beings to go with the king to the next world. Here were these thousands of terracotta warriors, these hundreds of horses, they are standing in for us for those real courtiers and real guards and real oxen that we saw in the royal cemetery at Ur, down in that death pit. However ferocious he may have been, he has taken—in our view—a humane step forward in allowing there to be images of people rather than the human sacrifices themselves. If we think of Egypt, the same process happened there.

The pharaohs of the first dynasty went to the next world with human sacrifices, but you all know what was in Tutankhamen's tomb. It was the same thing that accompanied other Egyptian pharaohs of later dynasties to the next world: images, statues of courtiers, boatmen, guards, beloved members of the family. It was their images who stood in for them as scapegoats. So we can see a religious impulse here sublimated into a less deadly form, purging itself of the actual blood and killing of these large numbers of people and instead putting forward the idea of the substitute, the artistic substitute, in this case, of a living individual. To me, this is the explanation of why there was such a fuss over making the faces realistic. These are supposed to be real soldiers. These are the warriors of the emperor's own army, one by one in their thousands down in that tomb. The realism of the faces, to me, proves the point.

Now this tomb was not allowed to endure untouched. In fact, the dynasty that the first emperor created was not allowed to endure untouched. His son was defeated by a ruler of another kingdom that had actually been absorbed into the Qin empire, it was the kingdom of Han, and that regional king, that feudal king, became now the ruler of China. The Qin in one generation—two generations, but the son didn't do much—one great king and his son, a two-emperor dynasty had welded China together into a great empire and a great nation state, which still exists today in much the form that they created. The Han then came along and simply put their man, their king—a modest plainspoken earthy sort of fellow—on the throne of these Qin rulers who had expected to rule forever. As the Han came in, as the Qin were defeated, we got a sense of the loathing of many of the people for this first emperor, who had asked so much of them and for whom they had sweated and toiled and, in some cases, given their lives. There was an immediate forming of a peasant army up there in the north, and they ransacked, according to the chronicles, the tomb. So it may be that when the archaeologists do get into the tomb, much of it will have been disturbed, destroyed, or taken away.

Certainly we can see the effects of that peasant army in the pits of the terracotta warriors. Many of them were knocked aside, some were broken. They were out of their files in the tomb and, as I said before, the bronze weapons that they would have held had all been taken away. So we only see the terracotta itself. The passage of time, as the roofs of the chamber were disturbed, and the soil got in and filled up the pits, the passage of time took away the pigments. They

were all brightly colored. Even the nostrils of the horses were touched in red paint; all of that went. This jumble that we see in the tomb or the adjunct to the tomb of our warriors may also prevail in the main tomb. I don't think any of us who are present at this moment will live long enough to see a time when the Chinese feel ready to tackle that monument.

This tomb brings into play for us a couple of elements that are going to resound in some of our future lectures, a couple of elements in the history of human religion that will have a very profound echo. First of all, the first emperor had added to his tomb, a temple, a place where he could be worshipped. In this, he is following in the footsteps of the pharaohs of Egypt. When we get to the Giza plateau, we'll discover that those famous pyramids—which are giant versions in stone of the pyramidal form and square outline of the quarter-mile-wide tomb of the great emperor in China, which dates to more than 2,000 years later—those pyramids were simply the centers of ceremonial complexes that were not dead feeling places. They were alive with ceremony and ritual because a temple was attached to each pyramid, just as the first emperor to his great burial mound, a temple where he could be worshipped, where he could be worshipped for eternity as the god that he'd wanted to be recognized as, here in life on earth.

That temple was the first time we know of in China where ancestors or an ancestor was worshipped at a structure, at a temple or shrine built near the tomb. Now we're all familiar, I believe, with the concept that ancestor worship mattered in China. That is perfectly true whether one came through the Taoist flow of nature tradition or for the Confucian, who did what's right as a member of society. This tradition, respect to the ancestors, was a cornerstone of Chinese religious practice. Yet no one had ever done anything more than go to the tombs, said the appropriate blessings and prayers, asked the ancestors favors. Following from what the first emperor had done at Mount Li with that temple associated with the tomb, structures, shrines, chapels, and small temples began to be built at family cemeteries all over China. That tradition continues today. There are places of worship, where the ancestors can receive offerings, prayers, tokens, or respect as if they truly were divine figures, able to reach out and help the family in the present.

So this idea of the temple to a dead person gets its first form in China at the tomb of the first emperor. Yet more intriguing for us probably is the entire idea of a human being turning himself—and I think it usually is himself—into a god, a divine being. We've already mentioned our Egyptian pharaohs. Sometimes we feel that there are documents from Mesopotamia that indicate that certain kings and queens were regarded as divine, but it's very rare in that world of Mesopotamia and Sumeria and those near eastern kingdoms. However, further west, there becomes a tradition that humans can be worshipped as gods in the Classical world. It had already been around for several centuries in the west when the first emperor decided to impose it in China toward the end of the 3rd century B.C., and it had a mythological background.

In the Greek and Roman world—but especially in the Greek world—there were divine heroes, people whose achievements in life had been so extraordinary that they were worshipped as demigods and had shrines and chapels and even temples built in their honor. Then along comes this man we've already talked about, Alexander the Great, who in his own lifetime consults oracles—the oracle of Zeus Ammon at the Oasis of Siwa in Egypt. It's confirmation he's the son of a god, he is himself a god, an exact counterpart in his conquest and in his divine aspirations to our first emperor of China.

His example was then picked up by other monarchs in the eastern Mediterranean and, ultimately, by the emperors of Rome, who insisted in many cases on having statues raised and places of worship erected to them, to their ancestors, that they were now gods on earth. The idea that you were walking around the earth with somebody who looked like a human being but was, in fact, a god is going to be an extraordinary element for us to follow as we continue to pursue some of the questions raised by the first emperor and many of his colleagues in the world of kings who become, not mere mortals, but god-kings.

Lecture Nine

Feasting with the Dead at Petra

Scope:

The “rose-red city” of Petra was dug out of the rock by a trading people called the Nabateans between about 300 B.C. and 106 A.D., when the Romans incorporated the rich caravan center into their empire. Although mystified later visitors called the enigmatic rock-cut edifices temples or treasures, most were in fact tombs. And most were furnished with benches where the living could hold feasts in the presence of the dead. Funeral meals are a universal element in world religions, but the cult at Petra was particularly elaborate. Special high benches called *triclinia* were hewn out of the native sandstone around three sides of a burial chamber. Here the family members of the deceased would gather to consume ceremonial meals in which the dead were also believed to partake. Similar *triclinia* and *biclinia* in Nabatean temples show a fusion of concepts about departed ancestors and actual deities.

Outline

- I. Now we turn to the site of the rock-cut city of Petra in Jordan, where the people had, for several centuries, a tradition of feasting with the dead.
 - A. The idea of linking a funeral feast with the burial of the dead is a very old one and is found worldwide.
 - B. In these cases, the food is either being presented to the deceased or is eaten by the loved ones.
 - C. The Nabateans at Petra bring these activities together by creating dining chambers adjacent to tombs for regular feasts with the dead.
- II. Petra is where the Nabateans settled around the 6th century B.C.
 - A. They prospered there and became a great, cosmopolitan, multicultural society and civilization. The fruit of their wealth was Petra.
 - B. The most spectacular carving in Petra is the facade of a building originally described as the treasury, which we now know is a royal tomb.

- C. In Petra we find many tombs, along with very grand temples to Dushara, Allat, and other gods.

III. Archaeologists have been guided by Roman and Greek records about the Nabateans. They basically did not write about themselves.

- A. Some visiting Greek noted that the way they performed sacrifice was to burn incense on sacred betyl stones and then pour the blood of sacrificial animals over those stones.
- B. The Roman geographer Strabo described the Nabateans for Emperor Augustus.
 - 1. They loved material things, but they were very open and tolerant.
 - 2. They were the least litigious people he knew of; they never brought lawsuits against each other.
 - 3. Women were very visible in Nabatean society, and women and girls sang the funeral feasts.
 - 4. They loved to drink, but drinking to excess was almost unknown.
 - 5. Through the 40 years of the reign of King Aretas IV, warfare was unknown in Petra and in the affairs of the Nabateans.

IV. Now we are going to look at how these Nabateans treated their dead.

- A. The actual act of burial in Petra could take almost any form, including cremation.
- B. The common link was what families would do after burial, creating a space nearby for regular commemorative feasts.
- C. These people were not imagining the dead going on a long journey: Grave goods were almost nonexistent, and the dead were believed to join in the feasts.

V. What were the feasts like?

- A. The feasting chambers were laid out like dining rooms familiar to us from the Greek and Roman tradition, with benches carved out of the rock.
- B. The eating and drinking was likely accompanied by women and girls singing.
- C. In a niche in the wall was an obelisk, the emblem of the dead.

- D. There were typically little holes and drains that may have functioned to cleanse the site, but more likely were for libations to be poured for the underworld gods and the dead.

VI. There are gigantic versions of these dining rooms in the temples.

- A. If the dining room has two benches, it is a *biclinium*; if three, a *triclinium*.
- B. In some of the temples there are gigantic *biclinia* and *triclinia*. We can imagine dozens of diners feasting there at once.
- C. In this way, a beautiful cult was created based on ritual feasting—the idea that food and the sharing of the meal links the living to the dead and that the dead are not only with the gods but have somehow become at one with those gods.
- D. However, there are no *biclinia* or *triclinia* in the royal tombs because kings were worshipped on mountaintops instead.

Suggested Reading:

Bourdon, *Petra*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Petra's rock-cut facades are familiar and exotic images. Did you have prior ideas about their religious meaning or purpose?
2. Are there modern analogies to the widespread ancient custom of feasting with the dead?

Lecture Nine—Transcript

Feasting with the Dead at Petra

Welcome back. We've had a very heavy start to our section on religion as it relates to human burials, what with the massive human sacrifices and the royal tombs at Ur, and with the megalomania behind the great tomb of that first emperor of China, who was trying to express his desire to become immortal himself through his own grave and its elaborate accompaniments. So it's a relief, I think, to turn to a site that presents us with the most life-affirming, joyous funeral ritual known to me: the site of the rock-cut city of Petra in Jordan, where the people had, for several centuries, a tradition of feasting with the dead.

Now, the idea of linking a funeral feast with the burial of the dead is a very old one, as we've already seen. If we go back to Shanidar Cave, we can remember that Ralph Solecki interpreted the remains of a campfire that had been built over a tomb and of animal bones nearby as evidence that the friends of the deceased had eaten a funeral feast in honor of the dead man. That was the burial known as Shanidar 4.

But it's elsewhere as well. If we go to second-dynasty Egypt, back in about 2700 B.C., we can visit the tomb of an Egyptian queen, where her funeral feast is lying there still on little round plates and saucers, in the tomb itself, with a wonderful array, perfectly preserved by the dry, desert air of Egypt, of foods that include a lovely loaf of emmer wheat bread. And then for the entrée some beef ribs, some cooked quail, pigeon stew, fish, a couple of cooked kidneys, and finally some berries and fruit stew for dessert. We can imagine the family coming in and having this meal and then leaving all those plates with more of the food behind in the tomb for the soul of their dead loved one to enjoy in eternity.

We also have an example from China, land of the first emperor, in the succeeding dynasty to the Qin, that first imperial dynasty, the Han dynasty. A noblewoman, the wife of a marquis, was buried in a tomb chamber that was stocked with big bales of provisions, of medicines, and even little compartmentalized precooked meals with the ingredients and components on little strips, with characters written down to say what was inside each box.

In all these cases the food is being presented either to the deceased or is eaten by the loved ones. But what we're going to see at Petra is something that brings the two together in a more consistent kind of way. I'd like to say before we enter on to this that some remarkable finds were made in this field in 2008. You may remember we talked about a great archaeologist named Dorothy Garrod identifying a culture we call Natufian, which is ancestral to the Near Eastern culture, a culture lying right between the Paleolithic hunting cultures and the Neolithic farming cultures there in the Near East. It's the same part of the world as Petra. It's in the valley around the Dead Sea. And those Natufian people laid to rest sometime around 9000 or 10,000 B.C. a woman who may have been a shaman, a very powerful female figure in their society, in a cave, in a little tomb surrounded by a curve of limestone, and she's on a little limestone floor they've laid down for her. She's in a flexed position on her side just like those Shanidar burials. And around her were the remains of an incredible funeral feast, far more than she could have eaten herself; 50 edible tortoise shells, or shells of edible tortoise, tell us that there were a lot of cooked turtles at this feast. There were bones of boar and pig that had been split open to get the marrow out.

And then there were also some bones that may have been part of her equipment as a shaman: the wing tip of a golden eagle; a few vertebrae from the tail of a wild ox, an aurochs; and even a couple of skulls of little martens, these rodents that are very important for their skins and for their fur. All of these look like the equipment of a medicine woman, as does the complete pelvis of a panther or leopard that was there in the tomb with her. So this extraordinary array shows us a big communal feast, along with material left for the dead to take to the next world.

And also in 2008 and reckoned by *Archaeology* magazine as one of the top 10 finds of the year, in an area we spend a lot of time in, southern Turkey, not too far from Çatalhöyük, in an Iron Age kingdom of the 8th century B.C., a nobleman, an important figure at the king's court, was buried with a stele, that is a stone slab, often inscribed, that marked his resting place. And on this stele he is depicted seated on a grand chair eating and drinking with a well-stocked table in front of him. His name is Kuttamuwa. Kuttamuwa is proud to state in cuneiform on his stele that he expects his descendants to come regularly to the stele to carry out certain offerings and rituals in honor of his soul. And to slaughter a ram and

leave it there so that it can feed his soul, which is inside the stone. And we very seldom have that kind of intensely explicit statement of the religious belief about the connection between the marker stone, the soul of the deceased, and the religious rituals that are being expected of the survivors.

I myself have had a person archaeological experience along this line of food and eating and feasting associated with burial of the dead. In a very historic town on the Ohio River called Augusta in Kentucky, there was a burial of a young woman about 500 years ago. She appeared to have been a war victim. This was a time of a lot of intertribal conflicts, as the east coast tribes and the northeast tribes like the Iroquois were finding pressure on them from the settlers coming in—the French, the English, and others—pushing them westward. And this little town in the Ohio River Valley may have been involved in these disputes.

This young woman had lost a hand and, I judged from the staining on the surviving bones of the arm, had bled to death. Her family had collected the body, placed her in a tomb, and had left by her ear this beautiful little pot a cooking pot, that would have served as a container for a funeral meal for the family, but then had been placed in the tomb to accompany this young woman on her great voyage to that distant land where the dead souls of that tribe went.

Petra brings these things together and takes them to a much higher level. At Petra a couple of thousand years ago, the tradition of the local people was to create dining chambers adjacent to tombs and to go to those dining chambers regularly to feast with the dead, to have great communal suppers in which the dead were imagined as being present. The people who carried out this wonderful ritual are called the Nabateans, and I'd like to tell you something about their land and about the story of their civilization before we dig into the details of their religious ideas surrounding the dead.

This place, Petra—which simply means “rock” in Greek—was a part of the Great Rift Valley that runs all the way from Turkey in the north, right down through the Near East, through the Red Sea, and on down into East Africa. If you've heard of the Great Rift Valley in Africa, that's the southern end of this gigantic split in the earth's crust. So it's a very dynamic and active geological area. The bitumen and oil around the Dead Sea comes bubbling up through this crack, and the crack has cut through the sandstones down near the Gulf of

Aqaba out of this place we call Petra and created incredible canyons and gorges. If you go midway between the southern tip of the Dead Sea, south to Aqaba, right in between those two points lay this amazing assemblage of gorges and a few springs, little canyons, where a group called Nabateans, who were of Arabic background, came and settled around the 6th century B.C. They prospered there. It was a place that they were very easily defended by the natural setting. They had the Springs of Moses, as they were called, that were near the mouth of the principal gorge. And then the rains of each winter provided them with a lot of water, which they eventually built dams and channels in order to store up in reservoirs and cisterns throughout the year.

As they settled down—as they herded their camels and their goats and sheep there, as they began to do some agriculture, terracing the hillsides and planting vines and trees—they became wealthy. They became prosperous, and they began to take over the caravan trade that ran from Aqaba in the northern tip of the Red Sea that's called the Gulf of Aqaba, up to the Mediterranean at a port called Gaza, which was four days' caravan ride away to the north and west.

Gaza gave them an opening on the great Mediterranean, and by 50 B.C. Nabateans were so much a part of the world scene that families of Nabatean traders had settled themselves in the Bay of Naples near Pompeii and Herculaneum and established a temple there to their chief deity, a male god called “Dushara,” [or] “he of the high ridge.” (There was a high ridge visible from Petra, and this was the deity who presided over that.) He had a consort named Allat; she was a goddess equivalent to Aphrodite in the Greek world or Isis in the Egyptian. This figure of fertility and motherhood had her own temples there in Petra itself.

But they were widespread. They didn't own their own boats and fleets; they were simply the middlemen, these traders, in conveying the wealth of the East and of the Indian Ocean into what was now a Hellenistic or Roman world. So through the hands of the Nabateans passed Chinese silk, Indian gold and ivory and spices, and, from the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, that most precious religious substance, incense—you call it myrrh or frankincense, it's the gummy residue that came off certain shrubby desert bushes and short trees. It was gathered there down near Yemen and the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, and then conveyed by the Nabateans into the

Mediterranean world, where every single temple—and there were tens of thousands of temples—had to burn incense on its altars to the gods every day, and where ordinary people, in making a special vow or sacrifice, had to acquire incense.

It's hard to conceive of how lucrative this trade would be; but it was all in the hands of these Nabateans. And they eventually expanded with their armies led by their kings, the first of whom appears about 168 B.C., the last of whom is finally conquered by the Roman emperor Trajan in 106 A.D. as their Nabatean kingdom is finally absorbed into the Roman Empire. But during those 250 years the kings had managed to create a realm that stretched all the way north to the great caravan city of Damascus. So they were very important people, and they ruled this realm from Petra, this rock-cut city.

There wasn't an ancient hierarchy of clans or feudal lords. There weren't any old landowners, because land ownership wasn't what mattered. It was one's own network of connections, it was one's own initiative in being able to pursue these trading contacts and make oneself wealthy through bringing from one part of the world essential goods and luxuries to another part of the world. In this way they became a city a little like Venice in the Renaissance or like the Dutch Republic and those cities of Holland: places of trade, places of international mixing of peoples and ideas. And in accord with this they moved very far from their original desert background and became a great cosmopolitan multicultural society and civilization. And the fruit of all this wealth, and the fruit of absorbing all of these ideas from so many places, was that city, Petra.

The sandstone at Petra is of many hues, from honey color to rose color, and it was easy to carve. But once carved it became very hard, and it has kept down to our own time, 2,000 years later, the crisp detailing on the beautiful flower images or fruits or geometric shapes that the Nabatean sculptors cut into the rocks of the cliffs themselves. There was a great city there. A number of the buildings were in fact freestanding masonry buildings. But the ones that catch the visitor's eye today are those that were actually shaped with their facades on the cliff face and then with little doors leading back into rock-cut chambers behind the grand facades.

Perhaps the most unforgettable archaeological experience one can have in the world today is to walk through the gorge that leads from the Wadi Musa—the Springs of Moses, the water source of Moses,

with the ancient, now dry, Nabatean water channels around you—through a gorge that eventually narrows to a point where it is only about 15 feet wide and, if you look up, over 600 feet high. And you are winding through this and then there begin to appear on either side little niches cut into the rock. And in those niches are things called betyls. These are little aniconic—that is, it's not an icon or an image you can recognize—aniconic representations of their chief god, Dushara, in the form of simple rectangular slabs. And you may have seen offerings, if you'd gone there 2,000 years ago, put into those little niches that are around you. The niches are still there. They are the guardian niches of this fantastic place that lies ahead of you. Finally, at what seems like the end of an endless journey through that gorge, you make a turn and ahead of you, you see glowing and brilliant, the reddish surface of a cliff that has been formed into conical towers, beautiful columns, level upon level of doorways and windows. You have reached Petra.

Now, the most spectacular, the sort of standard postcard view of Petra, is of a building that the Bedouin, who were guarding the site as part of the treasures of their own homeland in the early 19th century, told the first visitor from Europe—a Swiss named Burkhardt, who had converted to Islam and was therefore permitted to travel in the area—they told him that's the treasury. And we believe that treasures have been hidden inside it by the ancients. That's a very common belief, as I can tell you from work at many archaeological sites in different parts of the world; local people assuming that inside those ruins, somewhere, they can just find below the right mosaic floor or inside the right stone slab construction, they will find a treasure. At Petra that treasury designation created confusion, which has lasted right down to the 20th century. We now know that very famous facade is a royal tomb. And we now know, also, that many of the rock-cut features at Petra were not treasures, were not palaces, were not homes, were not even really temples; they were tombs. They were part of this extraordinary mortuary cult.

If you do penetrate through the canyons to the places where the city was, you do find very grand temples to Dushara, to Allat, to other gods—some of them recognizably borrowed from Syria, some with very strong Greek roots. Dushara himself was equated by the Greeks with Dionysus, a god of wine, but also a god of the underworld, since he is a dying god, a god who must be cut down as the vine

stock is cut after it's produced the grapes in order to yield the next year's harvest of grapes.

Now, archaeologists have been guided a bit in understanding the Nabateans by the writings of Romans and Greeks who recorded things about them. This is very fortunate, because although the Nabateans do have some inscriptions of their own, they were basically people who did not write about themselves. They were not particularly self-reflecting. So it's very lucky for us that, for instance, some visiting Greek noted that the way they performed sacrifice was to burn incense on the betyl stones and then pour the blood of sacrificial victims, animals, over those stones. And sometimes we find little drains leading away from stones to carry that blood away after the sacrifice and the offering has been made.

We also find out from the great geographer, Strabo, who in the reign of Caesar Augustus, at a time when the Nabatean kingdom still lay outside the Roman world, but at a time when they had linked themselves to some of the client kingdoms—for instance, the daughter of one of the kings in the golden age of Petra, King Aretas, Aretas IV, his daughter had married King Herod Antipas of Judea. A client kingdom of Rome, Herod Antipas is famous—not Herod the Great, but Herod Antipas, the king who was presiding in Jerusalem at the time of the trial of Jesus and who found no fault in Jesus and sent him to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. So the Nabateans were on the edge of events that have become very familiar as part of the history of Western civilization. Strabo described for Augustus and for his other readers what these people were like.

They loved material things but they were very open and tolerant. They were the least litigious people he knew of; they never brought lawsuits against each other. The only lawsuits that were present in the Nabatean world were brought by foreign traders against each other or foreign traders against Nabatean traders. Women were very visible in Nabatean society. Women and girls who sang performed at the communal feasts. And we have to imagine these are probably religious feasts. They loved to drink, but drunkenness, drinking to excess, was almost unknown. These and other details help give us the impression of a very lively place, a very congenial place, a place where the good things in life were valued. Through all the 40 years of the reign of King Aretas IV, the golden age, warfare was unknown in Petra and in the affairs of the Nabateans.

So into this sort of commercial paradise we are going to go to look at how these various families treated their dead. The actual act of burial, which seems so important in so many cultures and has to be done in a very specific way among many ancient societies, in Petra can take almost any form. Some of the dead were buried in the tradition we call inhumation. That's humus as in the earth; you are simply placed in the earth as a corpse and covered over. It's the simplest form of burial, the one that goes all the way back to Shanidar Cave, for instance.

Others, yes, the pit was dug, but then powdered lime, the limestone that's been burnt in a kiln in order to give you that preserving white powder, which will prevent a body from decaying, that was sprinkled into the pit around you. Others were partially cremated or entirely cremated. Some were placed in towers, some were placed in deep cists or hypogea below the ground level; all kinds of different procedures. But what seems to have been the common link was what families would do after the dead loved one had been placed in the tomb or in the ground or in a rock-cut chamber. They would create a space very nearby for regular feasts, commemorative dinners in honor of the dead person, at which it seems it was imagined that the soul of the dead person came and joined the party. One thing that's unusual about the Petra tombs convinces us that these people were not imagining the dead going on a long journey. Grave goods are almost nonexistent. So the grave is not being furnished as if with a whole lot of things that the dead person will need to take to the land of the dead. And that suggests that they are right there, ready to join the feast in these chambers.

Now, what do the chambers look like? Well, they take two forms typically. They are laid out like dining rooms, like dining rooms familiar to us from the Greek and Roman tradition. And of course the Nabateans were very much in contact with the Greeks and the Romans. These are rectangular chambers, and on either the two long sides—if you were to walk in the door, the two sides on either hand—or on all three sides, those two sides plus the one in front of you, there are stone-carved benches out of the natural rock of the cliff, on which diners could recline. Remember, people don't normally sit in chairs in the Greco-Roman society to eat, nor did they in the Nabatean society. They recline. They recline on a couch or a bench propped up on their left elbow, while the right arm is used, right hand, in order to pick up the food, the wine cups and so on.

So these benches, we have to imagine them filled with a jolly group of Nabateans who are sitting there at their ease, propped up on their left arm and then out in between are portable tables, not unlike, I imagine, our little tables for TV dinners, that would be brought in and placed in front them. They may have brought them themselves. One of the points that Strabo makes is they don't have many slaves, which seems strange for a community of merchant princes to us. But this was another liberalizing element in Nabatean society. Whoever brought the tables, there they were. They were loaded with food. And you were sitting there, propped up, and you were eating and drinking in memory of the dead person and very likely accompanied by music, which we've seen since the Paleolithic is an enhancer of the religious experience: music specifically in the form of this singing, of these women and girls, these choirs at sacred ceremonies.

Now, how do you offer things for the dead? Well, the dead are represented in the same way as the gods, up to a point. There will be a niche in the wall straight ahead of you as you walk into the tomb. And in that niche, instead of the betyl stone, that rectangular stone slab that represents the deity, Dushara, especially—and Dushara, by the way, is the protector of the dead. He is the great god who protects cemeteries and the souls of the dead inside them. No, instead of his rectangle, we have a thing like an obelisk, a sort of very elongated, tall, tapering pyramid shape. That is the emblem of the dead. Wherever you see that in Petra, you are looking at the marker that says this is the presence of the dead in the same way that the rectangle means this is the presence of the god. And so the dead would receive offerings from the meal, just as the god would in the temple or the sacred shrine.

There are also typically little holes and drains that run out, and these may have had two functions. One is cleansing the site, simply from a hygienic point of view; but much more likely, these are places for libations to be poured. And in the same way we sometimes have one or two little basins that have been cut out of the rock. And these may be basins for purifying people, filled with water initially, and you wash in order to purify yourself for the feast, and then at the end they could also be used for libations. The pouring of wine out of a cup on to the ground or on to the rock means an offering to those who are in the ground, and that can be gods of the underworld or it can be the dead spirits who are also pictured as down in that rock. In this way, the families would renew, again and again, their ties to an

increasingly large set of ancestors whose spirits are being viewed as just invisible, just the other side of that rock but still present in a truly wonderful way.

I grew up in a household where my grandmother and her brother fondly remembered lots of people going back into the 1850s, who they talked about with such vividness that my brothers and sisters and I somehow grew up with the idea that they were all in the next room, and if we just went through fast enough we could catch them. I think Petra was a lot like that. Children would be brought up feeling the presence of those dead family members and knowing that they had only to go to that chamber and join in the feasting in order to have a communion with them.

I mentioned a link with the worship of the gods. It's very striking that there are gigantic versions of these dining rooms in the temples. Let me give you the technical name for these two kinds of dining rooms, the two bench and the three bench. If you've got two benches, one on each side, that's a *biclinium*—"bi" for two, and the "clinium," where you can recognize the word recline in there. Plural is *biclinia*. And then if you have three, if you have the third bench that joins across the back wall of the dining room, now that is a *triclinium*, or plural *triclinia*, that is somewhat grander and more elaborate.

In some of the temples there are gigantic *biclinia* and *triclinia*. The largest one yet found, the side benches are 35 feet long, the bench across the top is 15 feet long. So we can imagine dozens of diners here at the shrine of a specific god, all feasting away, listening to the music, honoring the god exactly as they honor their own family members. And so in this way a beautiful cult is created based on the ritual feasting, based on the idea that food and the sharing of the meal is the thing that links the living to the dead, and that the dead are not only with the god, but have somehow become at one with those gods, are somehow part of that same supernatural world and set of beings that the living depend upon for their own sustenance, for their own success, for their own good luck in the future.

So as we look out over Petra, I hope you will now get a sense that we can see behind all of these rock-cut places, that we can realize that they were spots for families to celebrate their loved ones. And if you're wondering about those kings and that first treasury tomb, let me explain, there are no *biclinia* or *triclinia* in royal tombs. Why?

The kings were worshipped on mountaintops; their rites were celebrated up there. Their bodies had been taken up there. The *biclinia* and *triclinia* for monarchs are on the high places exposed to the open air. And, let me send you on your last walk, an hour up the mountainside, up one of eight processional staircases, to take you to the highest spot of all, where a *triclinium* cut into the rock of the mountaintop allows you to lie down, take your cup, and pour that libation of wine in honor of one of those lost kings of the city of Petra.

Lecture Ten

Druid Sacrifice at Lindow Moss?

Scope:

The bog of Lindow Moss near Manchester, England, periodically yields bodies preserved by the tannic acid in the peat moss. The skin, hair, and soft tissues are often in perfect condition, even though most of the bodies date back two millennia to the Celtic Iron Age. At that time, Druids seem to have overseen the ritual sacrifice of community members in the bogs. In 1984, modern peat processors discovered the burial of a man of high rank, buried naked except for an armband of fox fur. Lindow Man was in his late 20s when he was ritually executed by beating and strangling before immersion in his watery grave. Remains of his last meal—a charred cake of baked grains and some mistletoe pollen—were found by forensic scientists in his stomach. Clearly this burial was intended as an offering to the gods, perhaps at a time of communal crisis.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, we turn to the Lindow Moss peat bog in England, where we will encounter a human sacrifice.
 - A. The tannins and acids in peat will tan human skin and preserve human hair, fingernails, and internal organs, but the acids will eat away at the bones.
 - B. Bog bodies are some of the most important ancient human remains because they preserve the complete record of the soft tissues.
 - C. In 1983, peat cutters found the remains of a Celtic woman that were 1,800 years old.
 - D. In 1984, they found Lindow II, or Lindow Man, the remains of a young man.
 1. He was about 25 years old, weighed about 130 pounds, and stood between five foot six and five foot eight inches tall.
 2. He was naked except for a fox fur band around one arm.
 3. He appeared to be in extraordinarily good physical condition.
 4. He had led a life completely free of hard labor.

- II. Radiocarbon analysis dated his remains to the 1st century A.D.**
- This was when either the Romans were preparing to seize Britain or when Britain had already become a province of the Roman Empire.
 - The resistance to the Romans was organized by a religious group called the Druids, the religious specialists of the Celts.
 - To anthropologists, archaeologists, and scientists looking at Lindow Man, the likeliest designation for him was a Druid.
 - We know that the Druids practiced human sacrifice, which outraged the Romans and gave them a pretext for invasion.

III. Lindow Man's life may have been easy, but his death was hard.

- We know that he died near the bog because traces of the sphagnum moss from bog water were in his gut.
- We also know he'd had a funeral meal: a scorched oak cake, which is connected to other Celtic human sacrifice rituals.
- What really indicates he was a sacrifice was the manner of his death.
- Lindow Man's remains show signs of multiple deaths.
 - Somebody hit him on the side of the head with what looks like the blunt end of an axe.
 - He was then punched in the back with some sharper instrument so hard that a rib broke.
 - A garrote was wrapped around his neck and snapped it.
 - Finally, he was placed in the bog, and that drowning may have counted as an additional mode of death, although certainly by that time he was already dead.
- This looked like a Celtic religious practice because there were ideas of doing things in triples in the Celtic world.
- Another clue was that inside his gut was pollen of mistletoe, a plant sacred to the Druids.
- This is the proposed scenario for Lindow Man's death.
 - The Druids have decided a man must die.
 - They take a group to the edge of the bog, where a man picks the cake with the black spot and is singled out.
 - Someone standing behind him strikes a blow on his temple.
 - He is then struck in the back.
 - He is garroted and strangled; the neck perhaps breaks.

- He is carried into the bog and deposited in a pool of water.
- IV. What was the reason behind this sacrifice?**
- Tacitus tells us that in the north, bodies would be placed in lakes or in bogs for one of two reasons: as a method of execution or to honor a fertility goddess. The manner of Lindow Man's death matches the second reason.
 - Another idea has been proposed by Sir James Frazier, that this was the sacrifice of a sacred king for the benefit of the community, corresponding to a myth known worldwide.
 - Both scenarios seem possible.

Suggested Reading:

Ross and Robins, *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince*.

Questions to Consider:

- Your professor accepts the scenario of a Druid prince's ritual sacrifice as the most plausible interpretation of the bog body known as Lindow Man. What other interpretations might be advanced to account for the evidence?
- Are there any survivals of or analogies to Druidic religion in our contemporary world?

Lecture Ten—Transcript

Druid Sacrifice at Lindow Moss?

Welcome back. The Nabateans have done their best for us, with what has to rank as the most cheerful possible approach to death and to rituals associated with funerals. And I'm afraid that in this lecture we are turning to a site that presents us with one of the most gruesome of all kinds of funeral or burials—Lindow Moss, in England, a site that's not far from the city of Manchester and a place where we will encounter a human sacrifice contemporary with those beautiful family feasts in Petra. It dates to the 1st century of our era and it involves a man who may have been a Celtic prince or even a Druid.

Lindow Moss is a peat bog. And peat—which is an earthy substance which is in fact composed of sphagnum moss that grew in bogs and eventually becomes dried out and compacted and fit to use in your garden, or if cut up into chunks you can burn it on a fire as a fuel, which is often done in England—peat has an amazing preservative power. The tannins in the peat, the acids in the peat, will tan human skin and will preserve human hair, fingernails, internal organs. Bodies that are laid to rest in a peat bog and are never brought back into the air don't really decompose. The acids will eat away at the bones, which are all calcium, and so those bones become spongy and in some cases they kind of dissolve altogether, leaving an envelope of the human body with its skin intact, all of its vital organs and hair and nails still there, sometimes even the eyes still present, although the bones have disappeared.

And from these bog bodies—which are found in a little band across northern Europe in Britain, the Low Countries, northern Germany, Denmark—have come some of the most important ancient human remains, because they preserve what for archaeologists almost is never preserved: the complete record of the soft tissues right down to the fingerprints on these bodies. So this is one of those extraordinary bog bodies that we're talking about today, and Lindow Moss is the place where it was found.

Lindow Moss is an active area for cutting and harvesting peat. And there's a factory nearby where the big brown blocks of peat that have been cut out of the moss are taken; the stretches of water have pretty much dried up now. And in that factory the peat is sent along in chunks down an assembly line, it's vibrated to shake it all up and break it into the pieces that you want for your garden, since that's the

most lucrative use nowadays for peat. And there are people who stand beside these little conveyor belts, looking at the chunks of peat and pulling out things that won't work, big sticks or things like that.

Well, it was on a day in 1983 that a peat worker in the factory, who had the singularly appropriate name of Andrew Mould, noticed a piece coming down the size of a football. And he picked it up and joked with a coworker that this must be a dinosaur egg. And since it couldn't go through as it was, they took it over to wash it, and inside was a human head with the hair still present. The find was reported immediately. The police went through their old files, went to the home of a man whose wife had disappeared a few years earlier, and he confessed, on the basis of this discovery, to the murder of his wife. Well, he should have kept quiet, because as soon as the remains were analyzed, it turned out they were 1,800 years old and dated back to the time when the Romans ruled Britain as a Roman province of Britannia, and they were probably the remains of a Celtic woman who had been placed in the bog as part of a sacrificial ritual or perhaps part of an ordinary burial.

One year later, August 1984, on the same conveyor belt and with the same Mould in charge, a big thing that looked like a stick came down, and he picked it up and threw at it a coworker. You get the feeling that peat factories are pretty jolly places. Well, the thing broke up, the peat fell off, and there was a human foot, and they realized they'd found another one. And when they went back out to the bog and looked for more, this time with a forensic anthropologist, they found the remains of what were called Lindow II. And that has proved to be the remains of this extraordinarily important archaeological discovery, the remains of a young man who was proven by study of his remains—his teeth and so on, what was left them—to have been about 25 years old when he died, to have weighed about 130 pounds, and to have stood between five-foot-six and five-foot-eight inches tall.

He was naked, except around one arm was a fox fur band. That was his only decoration, though in life he certainly would have worn a great deal more. And he appeared to be in extraordinarily good physical condition. The worst that the forensic anthropologist who studied him could find were that he'd had a few intestinal worms that he would not even have noticed, and that he had a little bit of the beginnings of arthritis, but again, he probably didn't even notice that;

a fantastically well-kept young individual. No calluses on his hands—those fingerprints were perfect—and they could see the skin of the hands, and he had led a life completely free of hard labor and completely free of those rough activities like hunting and fighting that were the constant activities of the normal adult Celts in the century when he lived. And that was proven by radiocarbon dating of his remains to be the 1st century A.D. So he lived at the time when either the Romans were preparing to cross over into Britain under their emperor Claudius and take the island into the Roman Empire, or he lived in the second half of the 1st century A.D. when Britain had already become a province of the Roman Empire.

Now, the resistance to the Romans was organized by a religious group called the Druids. They were the religious specialists of the Celtic people, and the Druids were often recruited from the highest-ranking families. They could be men or women. They would go off and spend years in training as young people with older Druids in order to be brought into this secret guild—which wrote nothing down, so it's only oral traditions that tell us anything about them. Their name means “oak people” and the oak—*druos*, which is the Greek word for oak—was important to them as a place of sacred groves, oak trees where they would go and perform their ceremonies. The mistletoe, that little evergreen parasitic shrub that grows on trees like oaks and apples, was very important to the Druids. We get pictures in the Roman authors of Druids going out in their white robes into the groves of trees, cutting mistletoe with golden sickles at the time when the moon was in just the right quarter for their religious ceremonies. Mistletoe, green all winter, a symbol of rebirth, resurrection, fertility, and so on. These Druids did not fight. These Druids did not hunt. These Druids were of high social class. To the anthropologists, archaeologists, and scientists looking at the body of this young man from Lindow Moss, 2,000 years old, it seemed clear that the likeliest designation for him was a Druid.

We know that the Druids practiced human sacrifice. In fact, the Romans were outraged by human sacrifice. Both Greeks and Romans detested the practice. Now, the Romans made it part of their foreign policy, if they encountered a people on their frontiers who practiced human sacrifice—as the Carthaginians, being descendants of the Phoenicians, were said to practice the sacrifice of children at a place called a *tophet*, where infants were offered as sacrifices to gods in order to get success or victory in war—well, the Romans took that

as a pretext for making war on these people. On a certain level it's like the United States State Department, declaring certain things in other countries human rights abuses and declaring that we must do something about that. The practice of *suttee* in India, where wives are willingly or forcibly placed upon the funeral pyres of their husbands, ranks as one of those sacrificial practices that we object to, and is very much in line with this sacrificial practice among certain neighbors of the Romans.

Well, what the Romans had as an immediate pretext for trying to exterminate or suppress the Druidic religion was this human sacrifice. And sometimes the sacrifices were children, specifically if there was a bridge to be built or a house to be raised. A child's body, sacrificed for the occasion, might be placed under the first post of the bridge or under the foundation of the house, with the idea that the pure soul or spirit of that child would remain in place and guard the edifice, bridge or building, from the attacks of evil spirits in the future.

I had a personal encounter with one of these druidical sacrifices. Back in my undergraduate days, it was required that each of us who were archaeology majors—and our numbers were few—should go, in the summer between our junior and senior year in college, out into the field and complete our academic studies in the classroom with actual archaeological work, digging. And I was fortunate enough to get taken on at a site in England called Dragonby, a bit further north than Lindow Moss and over on the east coast of England in Lincolnshire, near the mouth of the Humber River. There was a Roman town at Dragonby that had been discovered during the steel workings in the area where bulldozers were scraping away the iron-rich earth and sandy deposits near the surface.

They had exposed a town, many centuries old, that had as its top layer a typical Roman town with paved streets and square houses on rectangular lots. But underneath that was a Celtic town, an Iron Age town, that predated the Roman invasion. The same people seemed to have lived there. Underneath the Roman rectangular stone foundations were the circular foundations of Celtic houses that had been made of wattle and daub and that had decayed into just dark brown marks on the soil. Under one of these one of my student colleagues, a young fellow from Holland, was working away, troweling down through these deposits where the Celtic peoples had

dug down into the—it's not really bedrock there but a subsoil, a natural subsoil. They dug down into this white sandy material in order to create the trench for the construction of their circular house. As he got around near the door—and the doorway was very evident, as was the hearth in the center of the house—the trench widened a bit, and his trowel hit something hard. And it proved to be the skull of a child. A child, judging from its teeth, about seven years old, couldn't tell if it was male or female, you can't tell that until the secondary sexual characteristics are expressed in the skeleton. But there it was, lying in its trench.

It's not unusual to find children in a habitation area. Dwelling places are usually considered unfit in the Greek and Roman world for the burial of adults. Those corpses were believed to pollute the world of the living. They needed to be carried away out of the city gates or beyond the community and buried far off from where people's houses actually were built. Children were different. They were often buried under floors. So to find the body at that point wasn't extraordinarily surprising. But the placement of it in the foundation of this Celtic house at Dragonby, probably from about the 1st century A.D., suggested it was possibly a sacrifice. And when the entire skeleton was exposed it seemed almost certain that this was a ritual death and not an ordinary accident of nature, illness, that had killed the child, because the child was lying flat on its face in a pit, as if the pit had been dug and the child standing in front of the pit had been struck on one side of the head—there were signs of damage to one temple—and then pitched forward into the pit with no one touching it and then buried over with the remains of the foundation material for that wattle and daub house.

It was an extraordinary experience. I think that's the point in my career where I began to feel, "I wonder if people are studying religion enough as it can be illuminated through archaeological discoveries?" and, "Maybe this is something that I should pursue." And since then—that was the summer of 1972—I have been indeed pursuing as often as I can, and in as many different cultures as I possibly can, this world of human religion as viewed through the medium of archaeology.

Well, back to Lindow and our man in the bog. The people studying him began to look as coroners would look at the body and try to find clues of how he died and what his life was like. We've already talked

about his life—very well fed, very well cared for, the hands showing no sign of work or rough treatment of any kind. I should also mention that his fingernails were neatly trimmed and his hair had also been given a nice clipping, as had his beard. So he's a man of the upper class, not a working man at all. How had he died? Well, his life may have been easy, but his death was hard.

We know that he died near the bog because traces of the sphagnum moss from bog water were in his gut. He had drunk water from beside the peat bog just before dying. We also know he'd had a funeral meal. There were the remains of a little thing made out of wheat and barley inside his gut. Originally it was called an oak cake; we don't know if it was something hard cooked like a biscuit or semisoft like a pancake or actually a porridge. But there was one place where it was scorched black, this mass of wheaten stuff that had been finely ground. And that gave the people analyzing it in the lab the idea that perhaps he had taken it in the form of a little wheat cake that had a black spot, a black burned spot on the bottom.

And there was a tradition in the British Isles, I'm sorry to say it lasted all the way down to the 18th century in Scotland, that if a community needed to kill a scapegoat in order to turn their fortunes and through this sacrifice get the good will of the deity or deities back, one way of choosing the unfortunate victim was to pass around a bag in which there were a whole lot of little oak cakes or wheat cakes, one of which had a black spot burned on it. And the person who pulled out the little cake with the black on it was the chosen one. If you've read your *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson you'll remember the black spot put on the page of the Bible that is going to determine which is the unfortunate man as it goes around, because that's a curse to get that black spot. So they felt that perhaps he had been chosen from a group of possibles, a group of possible victims, based on that, that the remains of the little wheat cake that bore the seal of doom for him, that black spot, was still in his stomach when he died.

Now, what really led them to believe he was a sacrifice and not someone who simply caught a fever and passed away in his 20s was the manner of his death. They were looking for these clues because already in Denmark and northern Germany a group of bodies had been found that showed signs of ritual killing. And at this point I would just like to give you some sense of the numbers we're dealing

with here in terms of discovery. There are about 200 bog bodies now that have been found in English bogs. There are also about 200 from Denmark and a few more from other countries in northern Europe. But Denmark and England are the two main sites where archaeologists have been finding these bog bodies, and there's of course now, with more than 400 to look at, a significant corpus of these remains for us to draw some conclusions from.

Over there in Denmark bodies had been found that had been deliberately killed in horrible ways before they were put in the bog. There was a fellow named Grauballe Man whose throat had been slit from ear to ear. One of the benefits, archaeologically, of placing a body in the bog is that all of the details of what happened to the body are plain to see in a way that with a skeleton they are not. Injuries to the soft tissues, injuries that are marks on the skin, are very plain with a bog body.

There was a young woman in Denmark who had actually been staked down into the bog, as if placed in alive and then immediately a stake shoved in to hold her down so that she would drown and never rise again. And one of the most famous of all, Tollund Man, who was wearing a nice little wool stocking cap, was lying very peacefully on his side and he had an expression of such repose on his face that everyone was startled to find, when they examined more of his remains, that there was a noose around his neck, and he had been strangled before being placed in the bog.

So our English archaeologists, there in the 1980s, are on the lookout for things that look like ritual killing. And what should they find but signs of multiple death. He was killed over and over and over again. First of all, somebody had hit him on the side of the head with what looked like maybe the blunt end of an ax. Well, let's hope that knocked him out, because the next thing was that he was punched in the back, so hard that a rib broke, with some sharper instrument. And then a garrote was wrapped around his neck—this is a piece of twine, cord, rope, wrapped around and then a short stick is put in there and twisted to inexorably tighten that noose until the neck snaps. And, in fact, it appeared that his neck had broken, and he died in this way also, in addition to be strangled in this way. And then finally, of course, he'd been placed in the bog, and that drowning may have counted as an additional mode of death, although certainly by that time he was dead.

This looked like Celtic religious practice. There were ideas of doing things in triples in the Celtic world. Three was a conjuring number, a magic number that had a great significance. One idea of the excavators was he might have been sacrificed to three different gods and killed for each one of them. Or that the tripling was simply an important clue to the importance that was invested in his death. Another druidical clue was that inside his gut was pollen of mistletoe. There wasn't much pollen in there, because mistletoe flowers before most other plants, it flowers in March. There's very little pollen abroad in the air at that time, so he wouldn't have been getting dandelion pollen or lily pollen into his system. But the mistletoe pollen was there, and the fact that he's by the mistletoe again suggests some sort of druidical, some sort of Celtic mystery about this death.

So here's our scenario, then: The Druids have decided a man must die. They take a group to the edge of the bog, where they will be placed and through a selection that involves the choice of the cakes, the man who picked the one with the black spot is singled out. He's a young man, 25, his whole life before him. He's led a charmed life up until that time, the life of a very elite member of society, but this is his final day, and he is taken to the edge of the bog, and probably someone standing behind him strikes him a blow on the temple. He is stunned as he falls. He is then struck in the back. Garroted with a noose twisted around his neck. If there's any life left in him, he's strangled; the neck perhaps breaks. And then he's carried out into the bog and deposited in those pools of water that at that time still would have been standing on the bog. Now, what's behind this? As with the Nabateans, contemporary with this, for whom we don't have many writings of their own, we are fortunate to have some Greek and Latin records about these northern peoples that lay beyond the frontiers of the Greek and Roman world. And an important source for us is Tacitus, a Roman writer who described the Germanic tribes and tribes even beyond them to the north of the Roman world.

Tacitus tells us that up there in the north, bodies would be placed in lakes or in bogs for one of two reasons. At least, he only describes a couple for us. One is as a method of execution. Criminals, murderers, sexual deviants were placed in lakes or bogs as the means of killing them. And they were never brought back and given proper funeral rites, as they would have been as acceptable members of society. That was number one. Second, Tacitus describes ceremonies in

honor of a fertility goddess, whom he calls Nerthus, in which priests accompany a sacred wagon or cart around the countryside in which is standing an image of the goddess as if she's taking a tour of her realm. And the horses, or whichever draft animal is pulling the cart, carrying it hither and thither over the countryside on its procession, on its tour of the goddess's realm, finally come to rest. And when they come to rest and when all of the proper ceremonies have been taken into account in order to end this ceremonial progress, some of the priests are taken out and drowned in the nearest lake as offerings to the goddess.

Well, now, this one's very interesting to us. We certainly can't prove that our Lindow Man was not a murderer or a sexual deviant or a criminal in some other way. But we can certainly say that what he matches more is a sort of priest-like status within society, with his beautifully cared-for body, his very good health, and his finely manicured and trimmed hair and nails. So it seems that perhaps this religious idea, that the priest is an offering to the gods, attested by Tacitus, implied in our traditions that we know about the druidical religion, is maybe an explanation of what's going on here.

Another idea has been proposed. You may have heard of a book called *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazier, a Victorian writer who indefatigably traveled the world, finding every possible tradition that he could that would open up the world of folklore and tribal religion to European scholarship. Up to this time, people had looked at the past only through the lens of the classics of Greece and Rome and the Bible. Sir James Frazier thought that was missing most of the picture. So he took one story from that classical tradition of Greece and Rome that couldn't really be explained in terms of what was known about the classical gods and goddesses and the ways they were worshipped, and tried to show that that was a magic entrance point to a whole world of belief and ritual that had been forgotten or overlooked, including folktales of the British Isles that went back to the Celtic peoples.

How did Sir James Frazier begin? He started by saying you are at Lake Nemi in Italy. You're at a shrine of the goddess Diana near an entrance to the underworld. And there's a tree growing in that shrine, that open-air sanctuary, with a golden branch, a golden bough. Sleeping beneath the tree, but only fitfully sleeping, is a terrifying figure armed with a sword. He is a man who is the king, the sacred

king of that sanctuary. He's a priest. He's a ruler, though not in a political sense; he's got royal status. And he is the guardian of this sacred place. And he is fed by the priests and priestesses; he's carefully tended. He's given whatever he wants, but it's his job to guard that tree and that sacred golden bough. And he will defend it against all comers.

Who are these comers? They're probably runaways, slaves, murderers, condemned men, desperate people. They come and as their last hope they try to seek sanctuary within the boundary, within the *temenos*, the sacred place. And he, with his sword, tries to keep them away. But just as he captured it from the previous priest or sacred king by killing him, so someone will one day come along who will kill this possessor of the sacred place and in turn take up the vigil.

Through this strange ritual, which is attested in the Latin authors, Sir James Frazier uncovered, in volume after volume after volume—if you see the whole sacred bough, it takes up half a library shelf—corresponding myths and traditions all over the world talk about a sacred king, a king who is, as I said, not a political king, but a religious king, a king who is a leader in the sense that he is going to ultimately die for the good of all, to die for the good of the people. He will go to the next world, cut off in the flower of his manhood—a very potent symbol—but prepared through actions and rituals before that for the fact that in his death the whole community will receive blessings of new life, fertility, and abundance. One man who dies for the people, something that Sir James Frazier was able to document all the way from pagan Sweden down to the other side of the world in Africa, in India, and even in South America. The idea of this scapegoat, this person who will be prepared for sacrifice and then cut off in the flower of his years so that the whole community can benefit from the offering of his blood.

This is no ordinary funeral in Lindow Moss. The possibility that our Druid was sacrificed at a time of great anxiety for these druidical peoples, who are now being suppressed and driven out by the Romans, is certainly a viable theory. But it seems also possible that he was part of a much more ancient and much more widespread tradition of the sacrifice of the sacred king.

Lecture Eleven

Honoring Ancestors in Ancient Ohio

Scope:

The early Hopewell mound builders of the Ohio River Valley (c. 500 B.C.-400 A.D.) left behind a landscape dotted with earthworks: geometric enclosures, gigantic effigies of serpents, and the famous burial mounds. Although the European settlers had little interest in these mounds, Edwin Davis and Ephraim Squier famously recorded thousands of these mounds and earthworks around Ohio and part of the Mississippi drainage. Through their research, especially at Mound City at Chillicothe, Ohio, we learn that the egalitarian Hopewell maintained walled ceremonial centers that enclosed burial mounds, mortuary houses, and work stations for producing dazzling grave offerings of obsidian, copper, shell, pipestone, and mica. The Hopewell proved to generation after generation, for some 500 years, that their ancestors had been great and that they, their descendants, remembered them with pride.

Outline

- I. In the 1st century A.D. along the Scioto River in the central part of Ohio, you would have witnessed a kind of funerary ritual very different from the Petra feasts.
 - A. On the riverbank was an earthen wall, enclosing a great ceremonial area.
 - B. This was one of the largest centers of the Hopewell cult.
- II. Edwin Davis devoted his spare time to the archaeology of Ohio.
 - A. When he met Ephraim Squier, they decided to travel around Ohio and the Mississippi drainage and try to document every mound and earthwork.
 - B. They documented 16 mounds at a place called Mound City on the outskirts of Chillicothe, Ohio.
- III. I want to explain how important their research was.
 - A. The Smithsonian Institute published their research in 1848 under the title "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley."

- B. The publication made Squier and Davis famous as the first people to take a serious scientific interest in these prehistoric sites.

IV. Louisville, Kentucky, had been a great center for mounds.

- A. They had been entirely obliterated before 1820.
- B. The Smithsonian Institution owns a crate of relics from this site that included effigies in the form of tubular pipes.
- C. On one of the more interesting pipes, there is a figure with copper spools for ears who seems to be dancing. He may represent a shaman.

V. Let's go back to our site.

- A. When it was in use, the mound was likely covered with river pebbles, which gave it a hard and easy to keep clean surface that was white and shining. It was probably six to eight feet high.
- B. Today there is an earthen wall about three to four feet high and covered with grass.
- C. Around some earthworks, borrow pits form a moat.
- D. Although many mounds were at first believed to be forts, they were actually devoted to religion and veneration of the dead.

VI. Let's go into the mound.

- A. The mounds are a number of different shapes, but under each one is an ancient wooden building that had that same shape as its ground plan.
- B. These sacred houses were individual, small subcommunities.
- C. Inside, elaborate rites were performed for the burial of the dead. Bodies were usually cremated or excreted.
- D. This Hopewell cult ritual was found among many different societies and begins to approximate what we call a religion.

VII. No ordinary living activities went on in the mounds.

- A. There were ritual activities and the making of objects of a specific religious purpose in different houses.

- B. The Hopewell acquired copper from Lake Superior, mica from the Great Smoky Mountains, seashells from the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Coast, and obsidian from Yellowstone to make these artifacts.
- C. After years of use, a given house would be dismantled or burned and a mound of earth laid over it in memorial.
- D. We thus see in Hopewell a way of honoring the ancestors where a daily affair is shifted over into eternity.

Suggested Reading:

Milner, *The Moundbuilders*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Most modern Americans are unaware of their own country's prehistoric sites and monuments. Why should this be so?
2. The Hopewell mounds commemorated the ancestral remains and the ritual houses that were buried beneath them. Does this practice link them to other religious traditions that we have studied or that you have known?

Lecture Eleven—Transcript

Honoring Ancestors in Ancient Ohio

Welcome back. Back in the 1st century A.D., at the time that the Nabateans were feasting with their dead in those chambers cut into the rocks of Petra at the same time that that poor prince or Druid of the Celtic peoples was being murdered in such a brutal way by that bog in England, if you had gone to the central part of what is today the United States, you would have witnessed a very different kind of funerary ritual and experienced a very different religious view of the dead.

Let's get in a canoe, launch it on the waters of the Scioto River, there in the central part of Ohio, and paddle downstream until we come to a landing space where, as we look up on the bank, we'll be able to see the top of a great earthen wall. We go up the bank, we go through an opening in the earthen wall, a little break, and inside we find ourselves in a great ceremonial enclosure filled with either great houses, in which wooden posts have been set in circles or rectangles in the ground, and they've got roofs that are thatched in a way, probably with bark from the trees. And also mounds are being constructed, great mounds of earth where some of those ancient houses used to be.

And if we poke our heads into the doorways we would see lots of men seated, men who belonged to one tribe or religious society. In the rafters we probably would have seen skulls, we might have seen bones here and there that were being the object of rituals. We would have seen beautiful works of art being created out of pipestone, obsidian, mica, shell from the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Coast, copper from the Great Lakes. We would be in one of the great centers of what we now call the Hopewell cult. And it's the mortuary traditions of the Hopewell cult that will be the focus of this lecture.

Let's remember back to Thomas Jefferson, his early experiment with that mound on the Rivanna River, his attempts to understand what kind of beliefs lay behind the tradition that created that mound. As I told you at the time, Thomas Jefferson's mound was one of thousands scattered all over the eastern United States, all over the South, right up into the middle Atlantic states; mounds that belonged to a lost tradition. That lost tradition was something that the pioneers of the European tradition and background had very little respect for or interest in, regardless of who made them. Whether they were the

creations of a lost race of mound builders who were, in fact, the tribes of Israel or the Phoenicians, or whether they were the creation of the ancestors of the Indian tribes that the settlers were meeting themselves, they were equally disregarded. They were in the way of farmers. Some of them ran for miles, parallel walls outlining straight sacred highways across the landscape, getting in the way of the plow. And once the forests were cleared, it was necessary to flatten the mounds and flatten the earthworks so that they could be no longer standing in the way of progress and agriculture.

One farmer, as he cut down an enormous tree in about 1810 in southern Ohio that was standing on a mound, an oak tree, paused long enough to count the rings on that mammoth of the forest, and he found that there were hundreds of rings on that tree, something like 400. Well, this took that tree way back before the Spanish would have arrived in the 1500s; he was in the 1800s. And so at least it could be definitely asserted that that idea we talked about in our first lecture, that perhaps the Spanish under de Soto or other conquistadors had built the mounds as military outposts, that crazy theory at least could be put to rest, at least with regard to that particular mound. But for the rest, very few people were inclined to notice them. One of the ones who did was a young fellow, a young Ohioan, named Edwin Davis, who in the first part of the 19th century attended Kenyon College, wrote a paper on the mounds of his area, and actually read it at commencement. The paper was then read by none other than Daniel Webster, who encouraged the young man to continue.

So Edwin Davis, although he became a physician and also picked up some surveying skills, devoted himself in his spare time to the archaeology of his home state, Ohio. It was about in the year 1840 that he met Ephraim Squier, a journalist who had come to Ohio and started a newspaper called the *Scioto* newspaper, that the two of them got together and decided to embark on a very ambitious project. They would travel around Ohio, their own state, which bordered the great Ohio River on the south, which is a tributary of the mighty Mississippi. They would then extend their researches to the entire Mississippi drainage as far as they could, and they would try to document every single mound, every single earthwork, because they were aware that they were disappearing at an extraordinary rate, being just plowed away into oblivion before their eyes. And so these two men, a lonely pair out on the great landscape with a boat and a lot of surveying equipment and drafting materials, went from site to

site recording what they saw and making fantastic maps and sketches and records. Occasionally they did excavate into some of these mounds. Davis was a self-trained archaeologist and did some very good work.

And when they got to that site that I sort of foreshadowed to you at the beginning of the lecture, that riverside square enclosure of earthen walls with mounds inside, they found 16 mounds there, at this place called Mound City, which is on the outskirts of Chillicothe, Ohio, due south of Columbus and due north of Portsmouth. And Portsmouth was a great center of Indian mounds in the days of Squier and Davis, although most of those have now disappeared. And off to the north, going a bit east from Columbus, there was an even more extraordinary set, with octagonal earthworks and great circles, at a place called Newark. Those have survived to us because they were incorporated into the Newark Golf Course. But most of the rest of the ones that Squier and Davis saw have disappeared.

We'll talk about what they found at Chillicothe in a little bit, but I do want to explain that what they were doing seemed so important that when they had completed—not the entire Mississippi River drainage, that was of course an area larger than the Louisiana Purchase—but some of the necessary research, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, in 1848 published their plans, their maps, their drawings and diagrams and their descriptions of these different mound sites in the Smithsonian's very first publication of all. It was called "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley" and it made Squier and Davis famous as the first people to take a serious scientific interest in these thousands of prehistoric sites that covered the map of the United States and yet were being so ruthlessly eradicated by the forces of progress.

Inside this great publication they put most of their focus on the mounds that were clustered together, not individual mounds but the ones that seemed to form little assemblages, sacred enclosures of mounds. The exception was some effigy mounds, mounds in the shape of animals or birds. I mentioned these when we talked about Thomas Jefferson. The most spectacular one in their area, quite near Mound City at Chillicothe, is called Serpent Mound, or Great Serpent Mound, because there are others, at Bainbridge, Ohio. If you were to grab the serpent's tail and the serpent's head and straighten it out, it would be a quarter mile long. But it is, in fact, in spirals and

coils along a ridge that terminates abruptly in a cliff. The serpent's head at the time that Squier and Davis visited had a complete oval which could have been the head itself, or, as some people think, that was an egg that the serpent was supposed to be swallowing as it writhed there on top of the cliff.

I've always felt that this was a dance platform and that you work your way along the coils of the serpent, passing and repassing other people in the long line of dancers, and when you got to the end by the serpent's head at the top of the cliff you threw something or somebody over. I'd like to go to bottom of that cliff and do a little archaeological exploration. I did have the good fortune in my own work in the Louisville, Kentucky, area to identify the only recorded mound in Jefferson County, a mound that was in fact on an area about to be developed for a housing development, and managed to get it on the state register of historic places. I was discouraged to see that even here, this mound that had been lost and forgotten for so long, there was a deep dimple in the top of the little haystack-shaped mound that suggested relic hunters had been there before me, and that it had already been excavated and robbed of whatever artifacts or bones might have originally been inside.

I was also interested to learn, in a trip to the Smithsonian Institute, that my own area—I teach at the University of Louisville in Kentucky—had been a great center for mounds. Squier and Davis did not see those mounds because by the time they got to the Louisville area, they had been entirely obliterated. But originally, if you had gone to Louisville before about 1820, you would have seen huge pyramidal mounds standing in what is today the downtown part of the city. But they were leveled in the 1820s to fill low spots and ponds and wet places in the city. And as some of them were being torn down, pots, pipes, bones came tumbling out of the excavations, and people recognized that these had, indeed, been ceremonial centers of Native American life.

As far as I can see, one of the few things that survives from that is a crate of relics that I was lucky enough to chance upon during a visit to the Smithsonian Institute, marked "Louisville, Kentucky," set up in 1876 as part of our national 100-year celebration. Celebrating the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the Smithsonian invited all communities to send objects to be displayed. And they displayed some casts of these artifacts that came out of the mounds in

Kentucky. And they include effigies of birds of prey, of ducks, of strange supernatural beings, all in the form of these tubular pipes that would originally have been stuffed with the sacred tobacco, lit at one end and then, through a reed, the celebrants at these religious ceremonies in these mound centers would have drawn a few puffs, passed them to the next person, and partaken of this sort of sacred communion of that holy smoke, those holy fumes, coming out of these pipes. As far as I know, that's all that's left of the great mound city that was Louisville. We're more lucky at Chillicothe. That site was not destroyed, even though at one point military barracks were built on top of the mounds. It was always recognized that this was an important place. People remembered that Squier and Davis had found remarkable things here. They found mica, obsidian, freshwater pearls, cremated remains. And even before Squier and Davis got there, there had been a farmer who dug into one of the mounds and found pipes. Now, I just described to you a platform pipe, and we have, from the Hopewell people, a cylinder pipe like those ones that the Smithsonian has from Louisville, the casts of those old pipes that were found in the early 19th century.

A cylinder pipe is simply a tube. Typically it's made of pipestone. The state of Ohio has wonderful pipestone quarries. This is an unusual stone. It was, in fact, a material that they could export to other tribes that weren't lucky enough to have anything like this. If you take a chunk of pipestone straight out of the cliff or the quarry, it is soft; so soft that you can carve it with bone or with a flint implement into almost any shape you want with tremendous detail. I have in front of you a famous pipe, a tubular pipe, that has a hole in the head and a tubular opening all the way through the body, and then there was a smaller hole through the feet. And this pipe would have been stuffed with tobacco and then smoked in some of these ceremonies anywhere from 1,500 to 2,000 years ago somewhere in the state of Ohio.

We have a figure here who seems to be, based on his bent knees, dancing. You're going to see that some of the sacred specialists of this Hopewell cult are our old friends the shamans, the medicine men, the people who can pass through trances from this ordinary mundane world of ours into the spirit world. And clues that this is an important person are in his ears. One of the things that was found by Squier and Davis at the site of Chillicothe was a lot of copper, copper that came from Lake Superior, probably from Isle Royale in

Lake Superior where there are native copper nuggets lying around on the surface. If you're lucky you can even find them today. And they were made, by people of the Ohio River Valley who got this copper, into spools that they would put in their ears, into decorative breastplates or gorgets that they would wear on their chests. These would sometimes have the images of birds' heads or animals in the flattened copper plaque. They didn't use them much for weaponry or tools or anything like that. This was a precious substance for religious and ornamental use, and we'll talk about that a little bit more as we go on.

Not only does he have the ear spools, he's got a very elaborately woven loincloth, which in the back comes down in kind of a fringe, like the tail of a turkey, a series of feathers across his back. And his hair has been cut in a very elaborate way. You can see there are two lines in the cut—that we call Mohawk, but it would be a double one—that come on either side of the opening of the pipe in the top of his head. So I believe we're looking at a shaman here, and I believe we're looking at someone who would have been presiding at religious ceremonies in those great houses that I imagined us visiting at the beginning of this lecture.

Now, let's go back to our site of Chillicothe, Mound City, that little square enclosure with its 16 mounds inside, and talk about what you would see there today. And I hope you will see it there today. I think you should all mark it on your map as a place that you'd like to visit and see a little bit of your own country's prehistory, and there's no better place to start than Mound City at Chillicothe, partly because it's in the middle of this vast landscape of sacred sites of the Hopewell people and their neighbors the Adena people. And not too far, a few hundred miles, from some of the great Mississippian sites like Cahokia, which we will be visiting later in the course.

So these are sacred landscapes of these prehistoric peoples of America. As you approach the site, as I told you, you today see this earthwork, this earthen wall, now all covered with grass. It almost certainly would not have been covered with grass in the days when it was in use. They had no way to mow grass, so probably it was like those mounds which can be reconstructed in detail: The thing was covered with river pebbles which gave it a hard surface, easy to keep clean and also something that would have been white and shining in the sunshine, a very impressive thing to see. Today that mound only

stands about three to four feet high. In antiquity it was probably twice that height. Erosion and some early plowing and agricultural activity have probably worn off a lot of the top of that wall. Where did that earth come from? Well, it came from outside the sacred square. And the borrow pits, as we call them—those excavation areas where the dirt was scooped out, put into baskets, and carried up and packed onto the wall by the people who were practicing members of the Hopewell cult—they're very easy to see all the way around the enclosure.

Around some earthworks, these borrow pits form almost a moat. And one idea about this moat is that it did, naturally, fill with water because of the rain, that it did form a moat around the square enclosure, or whatever the geometrical shape was, and that the idea was consummate with a Native American tradition that ghosts cannot walk across water. And so since inside the enclosure was the land of the dead and since the dead—although very powerful and beloved and cherished and objects of great concern on the part of the living community—are all those things, they are nonetheless also to be feared. We have our own way of dealing with the dead in the mainstream American tradition. It's expressed in the phrase "six feet under," that's the normal height of an adult, or certainly near the top of the height of an adult a few hundred years ago. And by getting people six feet down, they were buried so deep they couldn't easily get out of their graves, walk around, and inflict terror or trouble on the living. And so we find many cases where high walls or other enclosures are built around cemeteries or mortuary complexes. And one idea is that the borrow pits, filled with water, form such a moat.

The wall itself that surrounds Chillicothe, very smoothly made, very beautifully laid out, a very broad opening, is not defensive. There are other Hopewell works that were mistaken for forts at the beginning. There are places like Fort Ancient and Fort Hill—you can tell from the modern names for them what the settlers believed about them when they encountered these hilltops—where a contour line was chosen near the top of the hill, and then an earthwork was created in smooth, natural curves, to follow that contour line all the way around, with some openings. Both Fort Hill and Fort Ancient are like that. An elaborate myth was created that the civilized race of the mound builders took refuge in these walled forts with their earthen walls on hilltops—there's several of them in Ohio—and that that was their last stand against the hordes of uncivilized tribes who were

attacking them. Nothing could be further from the truth. We now know from recent excavations that both the “hilltop” fort sites of the Hopewell and the riverside and lowland sacred enclosures were devoted to the same kinds of purposes: religion, cult, and veneration for the dead.

Let's go in. As I said, there are 16 mounds now. Some of them are circles with a circular base and a sort of a conical shape. Others are long and low, sort of like natural ridges. Some look like loaves of bread. A number of different shapes, but excavations show that under each one is an ancient building that had that same shape as its ground plan. And these buildings, as I've said before, consisted of large wooden posts set in the ground in the outline of the building, and then smaller branches, now gone—all we have are the post holes or rather the decayed dark soil that comes from the rotted wood that rotted away within the post hole—but there would have been a weaving of whippy flexible branches between the posts, a covering of the whole thing with bark. The tops of the posts were probably flexible and could be bent over and joined together to make a sort of arched roof. We've got from the historic period up in the Iroquois area longhouses that are built in this way that were seen and described and drawn by some early European visitors, so we can get a good picture of what these would have looked like.

And if you'd gone inside we know that you wouldn't have found ordinary houses. There is not the debris of casual daily living in these. These are sacred houses, sort of sacred clubhouses. Think back to Petra, where I talked about the temple that had that big feasting area, that big *triclinium* with its two long benches and its cross bench at the top and its places for ablution or libation and so on. The people who would have gathered in that temple in Petra were people who were particularly part of the cult of that deity. They would have been like a society, not unlike, and I've evoked them before, Masons in our modern America, people who didn't go about in an aura of reverence, but ordinary folk who gathered in this place for meetings and conviviality and a sense of religious fulfillment.

That's what we believe these houses were that stood on the original spots of those mounds: that they were individual communities, small sub-communities, societies, clubs, maybe clan groups, maybe all people of one descent. But each one had their own house, and there seem to have been through time 16 of them, although since they

weren't all operating at once. We don't really know how many would have been present at any given moment.

What's going on inside? Well, we know one thing that's going on inside is elaborate rites that go along with the bodies of the dead. The bodies are ultimately going to be cremated in most cases with the Hopewell, though not always. But in many cases they have been exposed for that process that we've talked about before of excarnation to take place—“ex,” taking something away, and then “carne” from the carnation, that is the flesh, the meat of the body. So by exposing the body—probably putting stones over it so that it can't be dragged away—but exposing it to the air, you're encouraging the scavengers, especially the birds, to come and pick those soft parts off the body, the soft tissues. In fact, we know from many tribes, especially out on the Plains during the 19th century, special platforms would be erected made of wood, with the bodies placed on top so that only birds could reach them, and this process of excarnation could take place.

The bones then would be brought back. And it's possible then that the shamans would perform special ceremonies in which, with special ritual knives—and we'll discuss those in a moment—the last ligaments that held the body together would be severed, and then the bones would be reverently collected, the skulls perhaps put up in the rafters or displayed somewhere in some sort of a skull cult, such as is common all over the world. You would have felt the presence of the deceased all around you. Europeans would call this a “charnel house,” which is not a term of pleasant praise but rather the description of something frightful. Obviously, to the Native American tribes who were creating it—and I should emphasize that this Hopewell cult is found among many different societies—people who practice a different material culture in their villages have centers, which became mound centers eventually, where they have the big houses, the big ceremonial houses of the Hopewell cult. So it actually begins to approximate our idea of a religion; something which people who belong to different backgrounds can adopt, can join with fervor, blend themselves into, and feel they are part of a great community of faith that spans a wide geographical area.

Now, I said that there weren't ordinary living activities going on in there. This is very typical of sacred enclosures, that you don't do many of the normal activities of life. We'll talk about that when we

get to the classical Greek and Roman world, where those prohibitions are very explicitly laid out. But we certainly don't have normal cooking and preparation of food here. We don't have normal butchering of game. We don't have the making of pottery and so on. We have ritual activities. And in addition to the care for the bones of the dead of those honored ancestors, we have the making of objects of a specific religious purpose in these different houses.

They are, in fact, workshops. And the raw materials are exotic. Now, the idea that you are doing honor to your god by offering something precious and exotic is a very ancient one. We encountered it a couple of lectures ago when we talked about the Nabateans at Petra, who grew rich off the fact that the temples of the Mediterranean world all wanted to burn something truly exotic from a faraway place. They wanted to burn incense on their altars and were willing to pay extraordinary sums to get that exotic material. The same thing is true of our Hopewell folk there at Chillicothe in those long houses within the enclosure at Mound City. They are sending, and in some cases, we imagine that they are in fact themselves traveling great distances to acquire, let me give you a little list here: copper from Lake Superior—we've already talked about that, a journey of hundreds of miles; mica from the Great Smoky Mountains; seashells, especially they seemed to like whelk shells, a sort of a conch-like shell either from the Gulf of Mexico or from the Atlantic Coast; and most distant of all, obsidian, a black volcanic glass that takes the sharpest edge you can get on any natural substance.

Where did they go for that? We know exactly where they went. There's a cliff on the west side of Yellowstone Park that is pocked with deposits of obsidian, because all of Yellowstone is in fact a vast, seething volcano that's someday going to blow its top and has done so in the past. The obsidian was laid down there. Obsidian, wherever it is found in the world, seems to be a target for our ancestors, who want to get hold of it and make extraordinary things out of it. And out of this obsidian which they brought all the way back from Yellowstone—it certainly wasn't a hand-to-hand trade because we don't have obsidian-using groups all the way between the Hopewell and Yellowstone—they made these huge ceremonial knives for the dismemberment of the bodies and the placing in the ground.

After all these years, what happened? After years and years of using a given house, the house would be dismantled or burned, cremations laid inside with all of these offerings of mica and copper and so on, and then what would take the house's place? A mound. A mound of earth would be raised so that for all time there would be a monument to the ancestors who were entombed inside where that house had once been. The celebrations within the house, the rituals carried out by the shamans in their antler headdresses, some of which have been found made out of copper, and those antlers take us right back to Trois Frères and the old Stone Age cave paintings of shamans. They have disappeared, but now the mound itself is the memorial.

So we see in Hopewell a way of honoring the ancestors through the rituals of smoking the tobacco, through the shamanistic trances. Music was played upon bone flutes. Exotic offerings were placed in the ground for these beloved, departed souls. And then at some point, whose nature we can't quite understand, the whole of the great house of ceremony was dismantled, collapsed or burned, and became the site of a matching mound. So that what had been a daily affair now became something that had shifted over into eternity. The mounds were made very carefully of alternating layers of sand and pebbles, and shone in the sun with great glory. And they proved to generation after generation, for some 500 years between 100 B.C. and 400 or 500 A.D., that their ancestors had been great and that they, their descendants, remembered them with pride.

Lecture Twelve

A Viking Queen Sails to Eternity

Scope:

Many religious traditions have viewed existence after death as a journey to another world, but none in such spectacular fashion as the Vikings of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Ordinary families buried their dead in small boats or in graves surrounded by a boat-shaped stone curb, but royalty were interred in big ships of oak or pine for their supernatural voyage. The best-preserved ensemble of ship, skeletal remains, and grave offerings comes from the Oseberg Mound near Oslo, where the burials of a Viking queen and her female attendant were unearthed in the early 20th century. The ship itself, along with the queen's sledges, wooden bed, and other furniture, were elaborately decorated with monsters and supernatural beasts of Norse mythology. A fragment of woven and embroidered wool tapestry survived for 1,200 years and shows a scene of sacrificial victims hanging from trees in a sacred grove.

Outline

- I. In this lecture we focus on the Vikings' idea of eternity: It lies on the other side of the water, so they send the dead there in a boat.
 - A. We look at the discovery of the burial of a ruling lady of the Norwegian Vikings.
 - B. Her burial is paralleled by records of Danish and Swedish Vikings interring the dead in boats.
- II. In 1903, a farmer discovered a mound on his property and reported it to Gabriel Gustafson, the conservator of the Museum of the University of Oslo.
 - A. In Norway, mounds like this are likely royal burial places.
 - B. Gustafson was very excited because of the name of the place: "Oseberg" means "Åsa's hill," and Åsa was the name of a queen in the Ynglingatal saga.
 - C. Gustafson tackled the mound in 1904 and found that the ship beneath had been well preserved by blue clay that had formed a dense layer all over the central part of the mound.

- D. The Ynglingatal saga was fairly specific about when Åsa had lived, about 800–850 A.D., so they hoped to find artifacts of that period.
- E. Somebody had been there before, but although there was almost no real treasure, what the robbers left behind was even more valuable.
 - 1. There was everything you needed to set up housekeeping for a royal household in the land of the dead.
 - 2. They found the bones of two women: one was 60–70 years old; the other was in her 20s and was from the area of the Black Sea, or possibly Iran.
 - 3. The older woman was likely the primary death, and the young woman was likely an accompaniment.
 - 4. There were animal sacrifices too: more than a dozen horses, some dogs, and an ox.
- F. Carvings on the ship were in the 9th-century style, and there was the feeling that only Åsa could have been treated to such an amazing array of treasures.
- G. The ship was not in great shape, but they managed to get it out.

III. Vikings had very conflicting ideas about the next world.

- A. The goddess Hel presided over the place of nothingness.
- B. If you died well, however, Valkyries would swoop down and take you to either Odin or to the fertility goddess, Freya.
- C. There was also fear that the dead could come out and walk.
- D. Although the Oseberg ship was meant for a voyage, it was moored to a gigantic stone inside the mound and was filled with rocks that seemed to be holding it down—or holding the ghosts in.

IV. What was the date of the ship?

- A. Through the early 20th century, its official date fluctuated.
- B. Tree-ring dating later revealed that some of the wood in the ship had been cut in the autumn of 834 A.D.
- C. It seems very likely that the older woman is indeed Queen Åsa, and that the young woman was a captive brought up on one of the Viking raids.

V. The Oseberg ship, as a vessel, is something that we also want to know more about.

- A replica of the ship was made. When it was taken out on Oslo Fjord for some sea trials, it sank.
- The makers found it should have had one more plank along each side.

VI. In the 940s, a group of Swedish Vikings crossed to the Volga River and presented themselves as merchants wanting to trade.

- An Arab traveler, Ibn Fahdlan, had been sent by the caliph at Baghdad to study them.
- He witnessed the burial of their chief.
 - The body was put in the ground to keep it preserved.
 - The ship was put on a huge pyre, and treasure was heaped inside.
 - A slave woman agreed to be sacrificed.
 - There was feasting, preparation of elaborate clothing, and preparations for sacrifices of animals and the slave woman.
 - On the day of the ceremony, the body was placed on the ship and then set on fire.

VII. Let's end with a different image.

- There was a hero named Beowulf, probably from Sweden, who went down to Denmark and helped the king there.
- In his saga is the description of the funeral of a Danish king who was not burned or sent with human sacrifices but only with treasures and the thoughts of those who loved him.

Suggested Reading:

Graham-Campbell, *The Viking World*.

Questions to Consider:

- When archaeologists attempt to interpret royal Viking ship graves, they are hampered by having only a small sample of sites to consider. In what ways would it be possible to misinterpret such a burial?
- Considering our contemporary burial practices, do you see a close analogy between religious belief about the afterlife and the way we bury our dead?

Lecture Twelve—Transcript

A Viking Queen Sails to Eternity

Welcome back. In our earlier lectures in this part of our course that deals with the religion of death and burial, we have considered such questions as how to feed the dead, who should accompany the dead to the next world, how you yourself may feast with the dead onward in perpetuity, what objects need to accompany them to that next life, and how to ensure that while they are on the other side, they will act as benevolent intermediaries between you and the great powers of the gods.

But we haven't asked one of the most simple questions of all: How are you going to convey the dead to the next world and ensure that they make the journey safely? And the answer to that question will be the focus of our lecture this time, which deals with the Vikings, who had a very simple idea of eternity: It lies on the other side of the water; send the dead there in a boat.

Now we're going to be looking at one of the most famous archaeological discoveries of the 20th century, a discovery of a queen or a ruling lady of Norwegian Vikings that was excavated in 1904 on a farm near a place called Oseberg, not too far from Oslo. But what we will see here is just the tip of an iceberg, because the great royal ship burials, such as Gokstad and Oseberg of that Norwegian ruling group of Vikings called the Ynglinge dynasty, are paralleled by records of Danish Vikings and Swedish Vikings, as well that the dead should be interred in boats: if they're poor, very small fishing boats. Or if they can't afford a boat, a boat-shaped curb of stones should be erected around their tomb so that the dead will at least feel that they are in a boat for their journey to the next world. Or, in some cases, as we're all familiar with from Hollywood, the boat might be burned. This actually happened; it apparently was the tradition in Sweden. We'll be looking at some Swedish Vikings who get down into the rivers of Russia and whose funeral rites were fortunately recorded by an Arab traveler in the 10th century A.D. that will show us the burning of the boat to send the dead person to the next world.

But Oseberg is our main concern, and Oseberg first came to the notice of the world on August 8, 1903, when at a meeting of archaeologists and prehistorians in Oslo, in Norway, a farmer came in his black suit and black hat asking for Gabriel Gustafson, the conservator of the Museum of the University of Oslo. Now, it

happened to be Gustafson's birthday and, as he said later, no one could have had a better birthday gift than this. Because what the farmer had come to say was that he was farming at a place called Oseberg, south of Oslo but very close to Oslo Fjord, and he had a mound on his property. And he knew from what his neighbors had told him that in mounds like this had been discovered entire ships, ships that should have been filled with the treasures of kings because they were supposed to be royal burial places. And certainly the farmer knew that back in 1880, 23 years earlier, that Gokstad ship, that intact oak ship of the Vikings, had been excavated from a mound not too far from his own farm.

Gustafson was very excited because of the name of the place. Oseberg should mean the hill, the mount, of someone named "Ose," and even though the spelling was O-S-E, he was aware that there had been a queen, a ruling queen, a fearsome and powerful figure in the saga of the Ynglinge dynasty of Norwegian Vikings—that saga that's called Ynglingatal, or the tale of the Ynglinge. Her name was Åsa, and she was a queen who had helped establish the dynasty. She had been born not in Norway. A Norwegian king had gone, kidnapped her, carried her off, made her his queen, virtually raped her but installed her as his ruling partner. She simply bided her time until the child was born, and then she had one of her own servants catch her husband when he was drunk, kill him, and she took the throne herself. This is Åsa. And she then ruled for a number of years as queen regent of the Norwegian Vikings.

Could Åsa, this heroic figure from the sagas, be buried in this mound at Oseberg in a ship of her own in the same way that Norse kings were known to have been buried? Well, it seemed a chance worth looking into. So he told the farmer that he would be there in two days. He did a survey of the mound and said this looks very likely. He saw the diggings that the farmer had done down into the mound. They ended in a layer of dense blue clay, which had been artificially piled up by the builders of the mound at some time in the past. And he saw that there was oak wood underneath, ancient oak wood, just as had been the case at Gokstad, 23 years earlier.

So he said, well, it's too late to start now, so I'll be back in the spring. Well, the farmer was enraged. He couldn't imagine that this was a job of more than a few weeks. What was this archaeologist waiting for? The farmer became so incensed, he tried to find a

private buyer for the mound, now that a professor had certified there was, indeed, a royal ship burial inside. But fortunately Gabriel Gustafson got word of the farmer's discontent, went out and explained to him: Archaeology takes time. We will need to start at the beginning of summer and have all the months of summer if we hope to get out an entire ship and all the contents of a royal burial. That's why I put you off.

So with understanding restored, both archaeologist and farmer waited until the fair weather of the summer of 1904. Gabriel Gustafson came with a large crew, and they tackled the mound. As the peeled back the layers of earth, they found that that blue clay had formed a dense layer all over the central part of the mound, and whether knowing it or not, the Vikings who had raised the mound had in that way sealed in the ship so that it was preserved from the forces of decay. And that was one of the secrets as to the fantastic conservation of this wood, this oak wood that made up the Oseberg ship.

Gabriel Gustafson was very curious about what kind of artifacts he would find and what kind of ship he would discover, because the Ynglingatal was fairly specific about when Åsa had lived. She would have been born a little before the year 800 A.D. You can always remember 800 because that's the year Charlemagne is crowned king of the Franks down in the city of Rome and establishes the Holy Roman Empire. The Vikings were often at odds with the Franks on their southern borders. So, born a little before 800, and she died, then, about half a century later. What would he find? If he found things that were typical of the 11th or 12th century, that clearly would not have anything to do with the Åsa who was not exactly an historical figure, but someone known from the sagas, these legends of the early monarchs of Viking Norway.

They dug down and they found pretty quickly that somebody had been there before. Gokstad, this tomb of a north king, had been virtually looted of everything except the ship itself by grave robbers; grave robbers who might have come even during the Viking period itself. At Oseberg, Gabriel Gustafson was more lucky, because although he found almost nothing of gold or silver or gems or coins or precious stones or real treasure, the treasures that the grave robbers had not thought worth taking were even more valuable. Because the people who were put inside the Oseberg ship—and there were two of them—had been sent to the next world with everything

you needed to set up housekeeping as a sort of royal household in Valhalla or the land of the dead, that place that the Vikings called Hel, after the queen, the gloomy female deity, who presided over it. You could have set up a palace with the wooden furniture and equipment and the cloth materials—the tapestries, the blankets, the clothing—that had been sent with the Oseberg ship to the next world.

They found bones. The bones had unfortunately been scattered and disarranged. They must have been wearing rings and had pendants on their ears and necklaces. These had been ripped off, and in doing so the grave robbers had seriously disarranged the human occupants. Nonetheless, when the bones were studied it was realized there were two people in the ship. Both were women, and that could be told from the clothing as well as from the remains of the bodies themselves. One of the women was old, 60 to 70 years old, crippled with arthritis, and we now know from later studies she was suffering from cancer and probably died of it. But the other woman was in her 20s, a young, well-built woman, and DNA studies have suggested that she is from very far off, that she actually came to Oslo from the area of the Black Sea or even Iran. If that seems strange, we're going to be looking into what the Viking world was like in those days and how it is indeed possible there could have been a strong link between these Vikings up there at the northern edge of Europe and those great areas of civilization of the Byzantine Empire, and of the budding Islamic caliphates around the Black Sea way back in the 9th century. This is one of the things that excited our friend Gustafson as he got into the ship.

The carvings on the ship were of a style that matched what was known about Viking art in the 9th century of our era, that is, the 800s. The Gokstad ship had been very plain; the Oseberg ship was an incredible work of art in itself. It was not a warship, it was more like a royal pleasure yacht, but it had that same beautiful open symmetrical Viking form with the stem and stern post ending in these rings or spirals. The one at the prow, the forward section of the ship, being the head of a dragon and the one at the other end being the tail. And the whole ship was sometimes called a dragon because it took the form of this great beast, symmetrical, with head and tail forging its way through the waters.

Below the dragon head and tail were fantastic carvings of beasts interlaced, gripping each other, demonic things from the nightmares

that the Vikings had about the next world, but very much in the style of the 9th century of our era; another link to the world of Asa. And then there was the feeling as they got into the ship that only a queen ruling the country in her own right, as Asa was one of the few to do, could have been treated to such an amazing array of treasures. She had been sent to the next world with a complete bed with dragon-head posts, with a set of dragon heads on kind of wooden bars that may have formed the parts of a throne or of a chair. She had been sent to the next world with wooden sledges and sleighs. She'd been sent with chests full of tapestries and cloths. She'd been sent with bedding, with spare clothes, with little leather pouches—one of which had some cannabis seeds in it, a very interesting discovery—and she'd been sent with sacrifices.

Now, we don't know for sure which one of the two was the person in whose honor all of this was being put in the mound. Is it our young woman who came up from Iran or from the Black Sea and died at the age of 25? Or is it that immensely aged woman? Likelihood to me certainly says a woman dying of cancer is likely to be the primary death and the young woman is likely to be an accompaniment. And as we will see, the Vikings did sometimes practice human sacrifice at funerals of kings, and those monarchs would go to the next world with an attendant. On a small scale, a little like those rulers of Ur, with which we started our study of human religious practices around funerals a few lectures back. It wasn't just that one of these women was probably a sacrifice—in my view certainly the younger of the two—but there were animal sacrifices as well. More than a dozen horses, some dogs, and an ox had all been killed at the funeral ceremony and placed around the ship to accompany their mistress on her voyage to eternity.

They worked their way through the mound. The ship was not in great shape, but they managed to get it out. The keel was still intact and the planks that rose from the keel in that beautiful sweet curve of the Viking longship, they were there. They got most of that out. The stem and the stern piece had fallen off; those had to be collected, along with oars, bailers, buckets, all kinds of equipment from the ship itself. It seems to have been buried as intact, as we will see when we get to the plateau at Giza, Cheops or Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid, went to the next world with several ships buried in pits, each one complete with all the equipment of oars or rigging that it needed for its voyages, either on the Nile or through eternity. We're a long way from Giza, but

the Oseberg queen, whoever she was, was treated to the same kind of care in her funerary conveyance, so that she could make that voyage to the next world in safety.

But Vikings had very conflicting ideas about the next world. There was on the one hand the gloomy idea of Hel, the goddess who presided over the place of nothingness, of oblivion, of souls who were so dim and filled with nothing but a gnashing of teeth and a sense of emptiness that this was a punishment perhaps worse than hellfire, which at least would have been interesting. And on the other hand the idea that if you died well, Valkyries would swoop down and take you to one of two places. These are Odin's daughters, and they would take you either to Odin, or Woden as he was known in the German tradition, but in the Vikings to Odin's hall, Valhalla, the hall of valor, the hall of the brave, to be soldiers for Odin in the coming battle that's going to happen at the end of time. The Vikings had a very gloomy view of the cycles of human history, at least as far as we can tell from those late poems called the Eddas. There was going to be a great battle at the end of the time, Ragnarok, in which the forces of evil and destruction and death would emerge, and those arrayed with the gods, Odin and the rest, would battle against them. But there was another destination. There was a goddess named Freya, a fertility goddess. We have met her so often. She is our Earth Mother again, a goddess of womanhood, of beauty, of love, of fertility. Half the warriors went to her hall.

Out of this jumble of ideas, there was also the fear of the dead, that they could come out and walk. If you go to any modern Hollywood horror movie and sit down and experience two hours of living dead crawling out of the tombs, and their decayed faces appearing in windows and grabbing weapons and attacking people, you are dealing in a fantasy that Vikings would understand better than almost anything in our culture, because they are the origins of these horrible ideas about the dead, that they get out of their graves and they walk. And so out of all this jumble of ideas perhaps we can explain the fact that although this ship is meant for a voyage, one of the things that Gabriel Gustafson found was it was moored to a gigantic stone inside the mound, so that it, in a strange way, couldn't travel. And it was filled with rocks—not just ordinary ballast, but actually rocks that seemed to be holding it down.

That tradition of putting a stone over the place where a dead person was may have multiple purposes and multiple ideas behind it. First of all, the stone is a marker of the place, a permanent marker of the ancestor beneath; another thing, to keep out people who would dig into it or animals who might dig into the tomb; but certainly also the idea that with that stone you are sealing the dead person in, so that they cannot rise up out of the grave and come and terrorize the living. All of these things together seemed to be behind the paradox of the Oseberg Mound, that here was a ship meant to carry a queen and her attendant and her sacrifices and her treasures and her daily goods to a new life in the next world, and yet it was moored in place so that she herself could not get out and be a terror. And if it truly is Åsa buried inside, well, a terror she would have been.

What was the date of the ship? Until the 20th century, when the science of dendrochronology or tree ring dating developed, the date for the Oseberg ship fluctuated wildly depending on people's opinion about the artistic styles of all of the fantastically carved wooden objects that were in the ship and on the ship itself, as well as the styles of the tapestries. And these were some of the only tapestries [that survived]. Remember, they are more than 1,000 years old. They're made of wool and brocades and linen. Silk was found in the tomb. And yet they survived, thanks to the good preservation inside the mound. What were the styles and where do they date them? Well, we don't have to wonder anymore. We know exactly when that ship was buried, to the season and to the year. The central area of the ship included some timbers that had obviously been cut from the tree just for the burial, timbers that were part of a makeshift sort of cabin amidships. There were no normal cabins on a Viking ship in a regular sense because they were open: open pods on which people would sit on deck and no decks to go below, no cabins to hide in.

Well, what was the date of this timber? Fortunately, some of the actual outer wood, the bark wood, had been included, so you could count in from that to the center of the tree, see all of those alternating wet years and dry years, and see that these trees, when checked against a dendrochronological chart—a chart that showed from years of research what were the sequences, the unique sequences of rings in these trees of Scandinavia—that wood was cut in the autumn of the year 834. So within a few years of where one would put the death of Queen Åsa if one had taken the ancient saga *Ynglingatal* as a guide.

This looks very convincing to me, but I am a simpleminded person and I've been convinced by a lot of cases where myths, legends, ancient sagas, and traditions, especially oral traditions, have been to some extent confirmed by archaeological discoveries. We're going to get to the Shang dynasty in China and their oracle bones in a few lectures, and that was a whole dynasty believed to be completely mythical until their palace was found with oracle bones naming some of the kings that were mentioned in the ancient sagas and mythical records.

So I believe in valid until proven otherwise, and it looks to me pretty convincing that this is indeed Queen Åsa, that older woman. And that the young woman perhaps was a captive brought up on one of the Viking raids down into the heart of Russia, following those rivers that ultimately would carry them across some portages to rivers that flowed to the Black Sea. We know that eventually Swedish Vikings were in Constantinople as the guard of honor of the Byzantine emperor, and that the Vikings traded regularly with people who were in contact with Baghdad.

There was another animal sacrifice in the ship I haven't mentioned so far that comes from the same part of the world that the DNA of the young woman suggests she came from, and that was a peacock. These were prized possessions at the courts of monarchs and potentates in Iran and Iraq. In that area, the peacock was an extraordinarily sought-after prize. They don't breed easily in arctic climes, and that they had a peacock on board this ship would certainly suggest it was brought back from the Near East or from the Middle East during one of these Viking trading/raiding/mercantile expeditions to end up in the tomb of this queen as a precious part of her treasure for the next world.

Now, Oseberg, as we look at it, is a ship that we want to know more about as a vessel itself. And so a replica of the Oseberg ship was made—and this is, again, in line with "we moderns don't know everything." A replica was made and taken out on Oslo Fjord for some sea trials. And the BBC, television of England, sent a film crew to film these sea trials to see how this replica of the Oseberg queen's ship would do.

Well, it didn't do well at all. It's very low. It's very open. As I said, it looks like a pleasure craft. And as it plowed into the water, the sea came flowing in over both sides, filled it up, and sank it. I think this

happened twice. They were very mortified. They did a computer study and found out it should have had one more plank along each side. When they added a plank, it was fine and very seaworthy, but that plank didn't exist in the original model. And yet we know that this ship was a working piece of watercraft, because where it would have been run up on the beach, that part of the keel was very scarred and battered from a lot of use. So there are many mysteries left about the Oseberg ship.

Well, in a sense we have come full circle with this Oseberg queen and these sacrifices, both animal and the human, that accompanied her to the next world. We have, in this case, a record of a Viking funeral, not by the Vikings themselves, which includes that element of human sacrifice. And it's one of the most interesting documents known to me that applies very directly to an archaeological discovery. And as in the case of the Nabateans, who left nothing in their own writing to illuminate themselves but who are illuminated by interested people among the Greeks and the Romans, here again it is an outsider looking at these people who has left us the record.

In the 940s, A.D., so about 100 years or a little more after the queen was buried at Oseberg, a group of Swedish Vikings crossed the Baltic, went up the rivers of Russia, got to the portage points, and then carried or dragged their longships into the rivers that flowed into the Black Sea. They also were getting into the Caspian Sea, and one of these groups actually dragged their ship over enough portages to get to the great Volga River. And these Swedish Vikings—known to people in that area as the Rus, the redheads or red people—were met on the Volga River with their ships with the goods that they had taken in their merchant trading, because Vikings, well, they weren't the most admirable people in the world. They'd knock over monasteries and raid coastal cities that weren't prepared for them, but they didn't exactly shine on a battlefield in pitched battles with big armies. And where they met people that were too strong to raid or to fight or to pillage, they would get out their little scales and present themselves as merchants wanting to trade. And much of the wealth that flowed into Scandinavia at this time, and it was a fabulously wealthy part of the world, came from this legitimate trade.

An Arab traveler named Ibn Fahdlan had been sent by the caliph at Baghdad to study the peoples of the north. On a bend of the Volga

River he encountered this encampment of Rus. He saw the Vikings, who he refers to as the Rus and the merchants, and that each one set up a little idol and would worship it, praying for commercial success and great wealth in the future. The Vikings were nothing if not solidly materialistic. But he happened to be there at a time when the chief of this group died—their king. He'd already been there long enough and been to enough communal feasts to feel that these people were next to animals, and except that they were tall and good-looking, they were at a level of bestiality he almost couldn't believe in their table manners and so on. But nothing prepared him for what happened at this funeral.

Immediately after the man was dead, the body was put in the ground to keep it cold and preserved, because it was going to take a while for the funeral. The ship was dragged up on the shore of the river and put on a huge pyre of logs. And the friends of this king went among the women, the slave women who had served the dead man, and said, which one of you will go to the next world with your master? And there was a lot of hemming and hawing and finally one of them somehow sort of agreed to this and immediately she was separated from the rest, kept intoxicated or at least groggy with intoxicants, beer, and other liquors, and a woman, an old woman, called the old woman of death—this is what the translator told to Ibn Fahdian, the traveler—she was appointed to keep an eye on the girl and make sure she didn't get away. And during the days that followed there was feasting in honor of the dead man, elaborate clothes being prepared for the dead man, treasure of his being heaped up on the ship, and preparations for the sacrifices of animals and of the girl. And during the time these men also raped the girl and repeatedly told her, as the Arab observed: Tell your master when you see him, I did this for love of him.

Finally came the day for the ceremony. The body was carried up and put in a little improvised cabin on the ship. That was just like the Oseberg tradition. The treasures were put on board. It was a third of the man's wealth, was put on the ship to go with him. Horses that had been his favorites were run up and down until they were sweating, then their throats were cut and their carcasses were placed in the ship. Many details here that are very hard for us to understand—and we can't imagine that necessarily the Vikings would have understood it either—but ultimately the whole mass, once the girl had been put on, was set fire to, and up it went in a

great blaze. Ibn Fahdian witnessed all this, the sacrifices, all, wrote it down, and gave us a record of what a terrifying spectacle a Viking funeral might have been.

But let's end with a different image. A long time before the Oseberg queen, there was a hero named Beowulf, probably from Sweden, who went down to Denmark and helped the king there. In his saga, *Beowulf*, which is one of the great monuments of medieval literature, is the description of the funeral of a Danish king. A king not burned in his ship, not sent to the next world with human sacrifices, but sent only with treasures and with the thoughts of those who loved him. And I'd like to close with these words from the *Beowulf* epic:

They carried him to the edge of the sea. There stood the ship of a hero with a ring on its prow, icy, ready to sail. They laid down their dear prince, giver of rings and treasure, in the middle of the ship by the towering mast. There were many treasures from far-off lands, armor and jewels which must go with him. Drifting far, carried by the waters. High above his head they raised a standard of gold. Then they gave him to the sea. Grief troubled their minds and hearts, and no man can say, neither counselor nor warrior, who received that cargo.

Timeline

Ancient Eras and the Creation of Sacred Sites

Note that most dates are approximate.

B.C.

- 45,000.....Neanderthal groups inhabit Shanidar Cave in northern Iraq and bury their dead in pits. Shanidar is the earliest positively identified site of ancient religious ritual.
- 25,000.....Hunting groups in South Africa, ancestors of the modern San, create their rock art.
- 16,000.....Cro-Magnon hunters of the Upper Paleolithic era create religious paintings and small Venus figurines in Lascaux cave in France.
- 9000
- At Gobekli Tepe in southeast Turkey, a hunting community begins to erect stone temples like those later found on Malta.
- 7500
- A Neolithic society of hunters, herders, and horticulturalists creates a pueblo-type community at Çatalhöyük in south central Turkey (Anatolia). By 6500 B.C. the inhabitants were creating masterpieces of religious art and interring their dead beneath the floors of their houses.
- 4500
- The tradition of raising megalithic monuments begins in Atlantic Europe.
- 3800–2500.....Neolithic seafarers and farmers create stone temples to the Mother Goddess on the island of Malta.

- 2550The Great Pyramid is completed at Giza, Egypt.
- 2500Pu-abi is buried at Ur, Sumeria (southern Iraq).
- 2500–2300.....At Stonehenge, a circle of stones are added to a complex of circular ditches and post holes that had already been the target of ritual activity for about 700 years.
- 2000
- A Bronze Age society erects the first palace or ceremonial center at Knossos. The original palace burned in about 1700 B.C. The grand New Palace flourished until about 1350 B.C. The site was abandoned after 1200 B.C.
- 1350
- Amenhotep IV takes the name Akhenaten and converts Egypt to the monotheistic worship of Aten. This faith dominates Egypt for a single generation.
- 1300–1050.....The Shang dynasty is established and rules an extensive territory from their capital at Anyang, China.
- 1000
- In Bronze Age Scandinavia, a society of farmers and warriors records their elaborate religious rituals in petroglyphs.
- 432
- The Parthenon is built on the Acropolis in Athens, which had already seen a millennium of royal and ceremonial use. Its importance as a religious site would continue down to modern times.

300	The oracular shrine of the Greek god Apollo at Klaros, Asia Minor, begins its slow rise to fame and fortune; the Nabateans, who built the city of Petra, begin a lucrative four-century rule over the caravan routes between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean; Jenne-jeno (Old Jenne), where the ironworkers formed a religious elite, is established along the Niger River in Mali.
221	China is unified under Qin Shihuangdi, now known as the First Emperor.
100	The Hopewell cult appears in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys of North America, creating numerous ceremonial sites over the next 500 years.
	A.D.
68	With Roman legions about to crush the Jewish Revolt, the sectarian group that had inhabited Qumran for over a century (perhaps the Essenes) hid their sacred scrolls in the surrounding caves and abandoned the site.
100	At Lindow Moss, England, a healthy and high-ranking Celtic male aged about 25, possibly a Druid, submitted to a sacrificial death and burial in bog.
200	Rome has become a multicultural city where many different faiths and cults are practiced, including Mithraism, Christianity, Judaism, the cult of Isis, and occult rites of magic and sorcery.
300–900.....	Teotihuacan, northeast of modern Mexico City, dominates Mesoamerica.
400	At Ajanta in central India, quarrymen and sculptors enlarged an earlier set of Buddhist monastic dwellings to create the Ajanta Caves. The site was used for about a century.
450	Zoroastrian magi establish a holy city at Takht-i Sulaiman in northern Iran.
500	On the north coast of Peru, the “Lord of Sipán” is buried with finely wrought gold ornaments and eight human sacrifices.
600	The Nazca of Peru’s coastal desert come to the climax of some 500 years of creating large-scale images and gigantic line drawings in the desert.
675	At Palenque in eastern Mexico, a ruler named Pacal or Pakal (“Shield”) begins work on the stepped stone pyramid that would later hold his sarcophagus.
700–1130.....	Period of the Anasazi settlement at Chaco Canyon in modern New Mexico.
700–1500.....	Period of erecting large stone heads, known as moai, on Easter Island.

834	At Oseberg, near Oslo in Norway, a Viking queen and a female attendant are given a rich and elaborate burial in a big sea-going ship.
900	Mississippian people establish a great center at Cahokia, across the river from modern St. Louis. The site reached its climax between 1100 and 1200 A.D.
1000	The Anasazi begin to create ceremonial centers on a large scale at sites such as Pueblo Bonito and Chetro Ketl.
1113–1150.....	Khmer king Suryavarman II builds the gigantic Hindu temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia.
1450	The Inca ruler Pachacuti builds Machu Picchu, partly as a royal estate and retreat, partly as a ceremonial center, or <i>huaca</i> .

Glossary

ahu: The term used by Easter Islanders to designate one of the rectangular stone platforms erected around their coasts as a marker of a clan's territory, a center for religious rites, and a storage place for sacred images. The famous stone heads, or moai, originally stood in rows on the ahus, as if on a stage, but most had been overturned by the time Europeans reached Easter Island.

animism: From the Latin *anima*, “spirit” or “breath,” the belief that every aspect of the natural world—animal, plant, rock, water, wind, or celestial body—has its own spirit. Animism is often found among hunting and gathering societies, whose religious specialists, or shamans, grapple with the spirits on behalf of their people.

caryatid: In classical architecture, a column in the form of a human or divine being. The most famous caryatids are the stone sculptures of Athenian priestesses who uphold the roof of the porch on the Erechtheum temple.

cromlech: The term used in Brittany for a megalithic monument in the form of a circle of standing stones. The cromlech is thus ancestral to the great circle of sarsen stones at Stonehenge in England.

cuneiform: From the Latin *cuneus*, “wedge,” the form of writing originating in Mesopotamia and later used throughout the Near East in which clusters of wedge-shaped strokes were imprinted on clay or carved on stone. Cuneiform characters could be words, ideograms, or phonetic symbols. The script, which was used to express a number of different languages, remained undeciphered until the 19th century.

devaraja: From the Sanskrit for “god-king,” the term used by the Khmer people of Cambodia to designate the imperial rulers who had their capital at Angkor.

dolmen: In the Celtic language of Brittany, a stone table. The term is now used for those megalithic tombs that consist of three or four upright slabs supporting a large capstone.

henge monument: In British archaeology, technically an earthwork consisting of a circular ditch and a ringlike wall made from the excavated soil, chalk, or substratum. Confusingly, the term comes from the traditional name Stonehenge, where the “henge” refers to the hanging stone lintels that are unique to that site, not to the

surrounding ditch and ring of earth. In more general parlance, a woodhenge would be a circle of upright timber posts, such as was erected at ancient Cahokia in Illinois.

hieroglyphic: Literally “sacred inscription,” the term is now used for the type of elaborate, stylized, pictographic script that was developed by such ancient peoples as the Egyptians and the Maya.

huaca: In Inca cosmography, a point or location of special spiritual power in the natural landscape. Lines of *huacas* radiated out across the countryside from the Inca capital at Cuzco.

hypogeum: Literally “below the earth,” an artificially constructed cave below ground level. The most famous hypogeum is in Malta, where it served as a communal mausoleum for thousands of individuals in the Neolithic era.

initiation: In the religious sense, a rite of passage or a ceremony in which an individual begins a new spiritual life with a new social identity. During such rites, the initiates are customarily separated from the main group and are admitted to sacred places, where sacred symbols are revealed and the mysteries of life and death are explained.

ka: In the Egyptian religion, the aspect of the human soul that represents the spirit or life force. When the ka leaves the body, death occurs. The ka can be kept alive by offerings of food and drink at the tomb, though only the spiritual essence of these material offerings is consumed by the ka.

kiva: To archaeologists, one of the circular rooms, usually subterranean or partially subterranean, that served for religious and ceremonial purposes in such Anasazi complexes as Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon. The term has been adopted from the modern Hopi word for a ceremonial house.

lingam: In Hindu iconography, the phallic emblem of the god Shiva, an emblem of life force, fertility, and regeneration. In each of the early Khmer temples at Angkor, the king (as the incarnation of Shiva) would erect a lingam as a focal point of worship and spiritual power.

lur: A musical instrument of Bronze Age Scandinavia consisting of a long, curved tube of bronze with a mouthpiece at one end and a decorated flaring bell at the other. Pictures of lur players in the

petroglyphs of southern Sweden show that they were played in ensembles of two or three. Replicas produce notes that are deep and resounding, well suited to accompany the sacred rites in which they are depicted.

mana: In the religions of the South Pacific, spiritual force. It may be inherent in a person, an artifact, a natural object, or a place. The presence of mana accords with the idea of the sacred in English.

menhir: In the megalithic terminology of western Europe, a single standing stone. Menhirs erected in modern times in such places as Madagascar and New Guinea were often raised to honor great men or commemorate important events.

moai: Name given by Easter Islanders to the great stone heads that were carved in the quarries of volcanic stone in the crater at Rano Raraku and then dragged to the coast to be set up on ahus. The heads are believed to represent honored ancestors.

mystery cult: From the Greek *mystai*, “initiates,” Greek mystery cults inducted initiates into a new spiritual awareness through special, secret ceremonies in dark halls, caves, or isolated spots, where officiants revealed the true meaning behind life and death. Mystery cults were very personal, as opposed to the typical sacrificial cults of the state religion in ancient Greece and Rome. The Eleusinian mysteries, celebrated near Athens, were the most famous and later influenced both Christianity and Mithraism.

omphalos: From the Greek for “navel,” a stone that indicated to pilgrims that they had reached the center of the world at Delphi, an oracular shrine originally sacred to the earth mother Ge. In time, the omphalos stone became associated with the prophet god Apollo, so that its presence at Apollo temples such as the one at Klarios in Asia Minor was enough to indicate the presence of the god.

oracle: A prophetic message, the individual who speaks the message on behalf of a supernatural force, and/or the site where the divination ceremonies or consultations are held. Oracles are encountered in many religious traditions.

peplos: In ancient Greece, the single piece of cloth that was worn as a garment by women, usually woven of wool or linen. In Athenian state religion, the peplos was the special embroidered garment that was draped over the sacred image of the goddess. The peplos in the

Erechtheum on the Acropolis (where the holy image of Athena was kept) was used for a year, then replaced with a newly created robe at the time of the midsummer Panathenaic festival.

petroglyph: From the Greek for “rock” and “inscribe,” a specimen of rock art. In archaeological terms, petroglyphs may be either carved or painted on natural rock surfaces. They play an important role in depicting religious images and rites among the San of South Africa, the aborigines of Australia, and the Bronze Age Scandinavians of southern Sweden. The tradition is found worldwide.

rongo-rongo: On Easter Island, the script developed as a series of pictograms used for ceremonial purposes. Tablets inscribed with rongo-rongo writing were found in various ahu around the island, but the script has not yet been deciphered.

sarsen: The enormous upright stones in the main circle at Stonehenge, which were dragged more than 20 miles across Salisbury Plain from their point of origin on the Marlborough Downs. Sarsens are slabs that have been roughed out of hard, dense sandstone, and some are still found in their original geological positions. The origin of the name is unknown.

scapulimancy: Literally “prophesying with shoulder blades,” the type of divination practiced by Chinese kings of the Shang dynasty at their court at Anyang. Both scapula (usually sheep or ox) and tortoise shells were used in this oracular procedure, in which a hot poker was pressed against the bone or shell. The resulting cracks were interpreted as the answer to a question that had been spoken, and afterward scribes wrote the question (and sometimes the answer also) directly onto the object. These bones make up the earliest large corpus of Chinese writing.

shaman: From Siberian, this term is now applied to all spiritual specialists who act as medicine men or medicine women on behalf of their clans or tribes. Shamans typically master a great deal of botanical, historical, and other traditional lore, but when actually in action they often go into a trance state in which they encounter and overcome the spirits that are harming or endangering their people. Shamanism is typically a component of an animistic religious tradition, although in Maya centers shamans still served the common people at a time when the ceremonial centers were dominated by kings, gods, priests, and temples.

sipapu: In the traditions of the modern Pueblo tribes such as the Hopi, a mythical hole through which the ancestral humans emerged into this world from the dark underworld, led by a figure named Locust who was playing a flute. The souls of the dead now pass to the Third World or underworld through this primal *sipapu*, but the figure named Coyote has placed a stone over the hole so that only kachinas spiritus can reemerge from it. The term *sipapu* also applied to the symbolic holes that were placed at the centers of kivas, and such *sipapus* could also take the form of water holes or other features in the natural landscape.

tapu: In the religious traditions of the South Pacific, the term applied to persons, objects, or places that have been declared supremely sacred by the religious authorities and must be left strictly alone and untouched—hence our modern Western word “taboo.”

tell: From Arabic, an artificial hill composed of layer upon layer of ancient cities. Tells form in areas where mud brick was used for buildings, and the decay of the architecture through time seals in the old living floors and streets and allows for new construction on top. Troy was a tell with at least nine superimposed settlements; other famous tells are Jericho and Ur.

triclinia: Pieces of built-in furniture consisting of benches around three sides of a room. Greeks and Romans used *triclinia* in their dining rooms, and the Nabataeans of Petra adopted the design for their tomb chambers, where feasting with the dead was an important ritual for families of the deceased.

ziggurat: From the Akkadian for “building on a raised area,” now used to designate the stepped pyramids in the ancient cities of Mesopotamia and surrounding areas. Each ziggurat had a shrine or small temple at its summit, accessible only to priests (and possibly kings). Ziggurats, often built of mud brick with an external sheathing of fired brick or bitumen, were the chief features of religious complexes that included courtyards, places of sacrifice, places of purification, storerooms, and living quarters for priests. The ziggurat of Babylon is the original of the biblical Tower of Babel.

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Notes

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